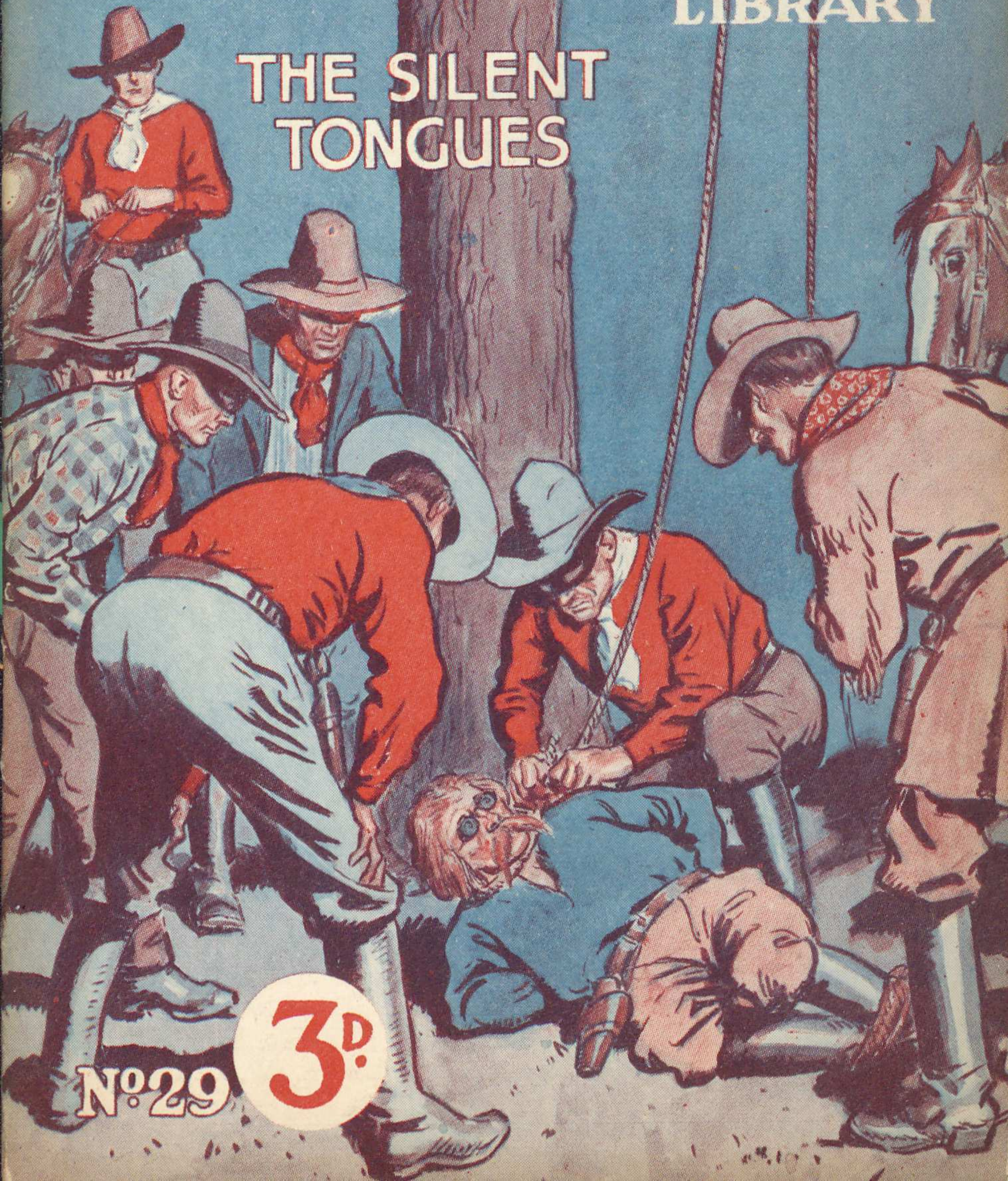


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THE SILENT TONGUES

CHAPTER I

THE SWOOP OF THE SILENT TONGUES

FROM Del Norte to the southwestern mines of Colorado, along the rapid and impetuous waters of the *Rio de los Animas*, and through the rugged, mountainous district of San Juan county, runs the stage-trail, which is used in lieu of a railroad, as a route of transportation both of people and supplies, into the mines that abound in the vicinity of Silverton and Animas City.

A balmy October day is drawing to a close, as old Sol rests his beaming face upon the crest of a western peak, on his way to retirement from the active scenes of the day. The rays from his merry countenance shoot across to the more eastern mountains, and then reflect down into the depths of the gloomy San Juan.

About the same time the lull of repose is rudely awakened by the sharp cracking, as of a whip, and a loud, rumbling, jolting sound—then the south-bound stage rolls into view, from around a bend, drawn by three spans of spirited horses, that in turn are held in hand by a little Canadian Jehu, who, from long experience, thoroughly understands his business.

No ordinary affair, this stage, as an ordinary observer would have at once perceived, for its size was doubly greater than other vehicles of its calling, thereby bringing into use a greater number of horses, and it was neatly furnished, too. That night it was literally loaded down, both with passengers and baggage.

Every seat in the interior was occupied, and even the flat top had been converted into a carryall, for it was occupied by several persons of both sexes.

The occupants of the interior of the *Monitor*, as the stage was known, were all men—mostly rough, bearded, red-shirted miners, with a sprinkling of ruffians, speculators and gamblers.

Upon the outside the passengers were of a more varying type.

Down through the canyon tears the stage, close at the heels of the plunging, snorting horses, who are answering to the rapid crack of the fiery little French Kanuck's whip.

And let us grasp the flying moment for an inventory of the *personnel* of those upon the roof of the *Monitor*.

La Carte, the Jehu, needs no portrayal. He is known from Denver to Trinidad—from Leadville to Conejos, and all through the mining districts of the Colorados, as an expert linesman, a dead-shot, and a fear-naught of the boldest road-agent that ever robbed a stage.

Next to him, upon the driver's seat, is a portly, distinguished-looking personage, with brown hair, moustache and side-whiskers, and eyes to match. He is attired in the very height of elegance as to costume, and evidently is a man of some importance. His name is Hon. Ray Vernon, of Ohio. He sits at the right of La Carte; next to him, upon the top of the stage are two border-men—one a little old man, with wrinkled features and silvered locks; the other a giant in stature, with a positively ugly countenance.

Next to the giant sits a clerical gentleman of solemn mien, and a remarkably pretty and vivacious young lady, who evidently is his daughter; then comes a dandyish fellow of handsome face and form, whose dress is a model of elegance; then another lady and gent, upon whom the other passengers centre considerable attention.

This woman is slight of figure, and is clad in black of costly kind, and a heavy veil constantly over her face, thereby screening it from the inquiring gaze of the passengers.

The man is medium size, attired in a stylish suit of light cloth, with a shirt front of spotless white, ornamented by a blazing diamond pin, while he has a jaunty white slouch sombrero upon his head, and alligator

top-boots upon his feet, the legs of which reach above his knees.

In face and feature he is quite prepossessing—his white complexion harmonizing well with his long blonde hair, and sweeping moustache of the same hue. His mouth has a firm expression, and his forehead is broad and intellectual, while his eyes are hidden behind a pair of green goggles, that give him a strange appearance.

A belt about his waist contains a pair of serviceable revolvers, and a Winchester rifle is among his effects as baggage.

All of the other outside passengers are armed, except the man from Ohio, the clerical gentleman, and the two ladies, none of whom appear to carry weapons of defence. Especially was the big border-man well armed, for his belt boasted of no less than six formidable revolvers, and a huge knife that glittered dangerously.

"I tell ye what, et don't pay fer ter go unarmed in this kentry!" he observed, after surveying those of the passengers who were unarmed, with a critical glance. "A galoot ain't safe onless he kerries a hull battery hitched onter his waist. Hillo! capt'in, I see ye don't go none on six-shooters?"

"No, my friend," the clerical man replied, solemnly. "I ask for no weapons other than those the Lord gave me."

"Oho! thet's et, hey? Hain't no fight in you, then, I'll allow!"

"I get not my living, sir, by fighting my fellow-creatures," was the reply. "I am a servant of the Lord, and I preach His word to the flock with which He peoples the earth. If a man smite me upon my right cheek, I rise not in anger, but turn about my left cheek, that he may smite that also."

"Kerwhoop! Great catapultian comets an' roarin' rhinosses!" exclaimed the giant, with a snort. "D'ye heer thet, Alva—did ye heer thet ar' sentyment, jest now uttered by thet ar' clargyman? Gol-darn my old mule's capacity fer terant'ler, ef evyer I heerd a sarcumstance ter ekal. Say, old hoss, ef a pilgrim war ter salivate ye in ther eye wi' a disused quid o' ter-baccy, w'u'd ye turn yer uther optic around, an' give 'im a shot at that?"

"I would in truth," the clerical party replied. "He who heedeth the words of the Creator need fear nothing here below."

"Waal, I'll be shot ef I quite agree wi' yer docterine, purfessor," the giant replied, grimly. "Et don't hitch wi' ther great state of hooman affairs out in this kentry. Here am I, Beautiful Bill, ther Apoller o' ther Nor'west—ther great Pet Elerfant o' ther Leadville trail—that's me! This

leetle squinged-up cuss aside me, air Old Avalanche, familiarly recognized in modern spellin' an' hymn-books as ther Great Annihilator—ther Devastatin' Eppydemic o' ther West. Waal, now, ye see, we've j'ined forces an' capertal, an' now constitute ther Death Committee of ther Mines. Ye'll heer uv us everywhar whar ther auriferous vegetates—a sure extarminatin' pestilence fer road agents, hoss-thieves, card-sharps an' ruffians.

"Our pulpit's a tarred rope—our platform et be ther limb o' ther fu'st convenient tree. Now, I'll bet ary pilgrim a bite right out o' my off ear thet we, ther great Trans-Atlantic an' Percific Death Committee, an' Society fer Practical Elevation, kin convert more sinners in one minnit than a burro-load o' preachers, philosophers, or any other sich critters. That's me, every time—Beautiful Bill, ther Grecian Apoller o' San Won county—ther thurrobreed Masher o' ther Animas!"

A smile went around among the passengers at the giant's speech, in which the clerical party did not participate.

At this juncture the stage plunged more rapidly down through a narrower portion of the canyon valley, where it was darker and more weirdly gloomy.

"Now, feller-citizens, git yer pepper-boxes in shape, an' keep yer eyes open, ef ye've got a full hand o' swag!" announced Beautiful Bill, "fer we're sailin' right inter a prime locality fer road-agents. S'pect ye've heerd about ther Silent Tongues, an' how they tackle this trail, twicet ev'ry month. Reckon, thar don't much swag git thru on ther *Monitor*, them nights—eh, Carte?"

"Hardly ever," the stage-driver replied, grimly. "To-night is the regular time for a raid, that's true. I had nearly forgotten it. Bad, too!"

"Why bad?" the man from Ohio demanded, anxiously.

"Because, there's a full treasure-box, to-night. See the man with the goggles?"

"Yes."

"Waal, he's got a heap o' gold aboard, an a heap of greenbacks, too."

"Who is he?"

"Don't know 'cept some one up at Lake City called him Blonde Bill. He got on, there, along wi' the veiled woman."

Hon. Ray Vernon took the liberty to turn in his seat, and gaze keenly at the blonde stranger. When he turned again to La Carte, he spoke, in an undertone:

"So he has considerable treasure, eh? Where is he bound for?"

"Deadwood Dick's Discovery."

"Ah! where is that?"

"Oh! that's a new strike 'twixt Silverton

and Parrot City. 'Tain't much of a place yet, but they say there's good prospects of a new Leadville."

The Ohioan was silent a few minutes, after which he continued:

"This Deadwood Dick is a road-agent, isn't he?"

"No—that is, he ain't any more. Thet used ter be his profession. But, they say he quit off, awhile ago. Et don't do him much good, however, fer ther people have got a grudge ag'in' him, and won't let him alone. Fer instance, he is sed to have discovered the new mines that bear his name, but a gang from Silverton went down and cleared him out, and took possession. Ah! the imps! road-agents! the Silent Tongues are upon us!"

The cry of the driver awoke startled echoes up and down the canyon!

The horses had been suddenly hurled back upon their haunches, thereby bringing the stage to a standstill in the gloomy canyon.

Then out from many a niche and sheltering rock poured a crowd of dusky figures, masked, and armed to the teeth, and surrounded the stage in less time than it takes to tell it.

"No use to offer resistance, boys!" La Carte shouted. "They're two to our one, an' hev got the drop!"

"Fight's the word!" cried the blonde stranger, as he sprang to his feet, a cocked revolver in either hand. "Rally, all! the dogs must not touch the treasure-box!"

The words were electric in their result.

Beautiful Bill and Avalanche were instantly by the blonde man's side, weapons in hand.

And also the individual who wore an imperial and waxed moustache.

"Give it to 'em!" the blonde man cried, "an' charge it to Blonde Bill. Fight for your lives and the safety and preservation of your rights!"

No second time did the blonde man have to speak; for the weapons of the others poured a volley of death into the ranks of the outlaws, even as did his own.

Crack! crack! crack! rang the sharp report of the pistols, accompanied by flash after flash, and yell after yell of pain and rage.

But the passengers were not the only ones to fire, for the Silent Tongues—so called because they were never heard to speak—returned the fusilade with interest.

The miners within the coach also engaged in the fight, by firing from the windows, and there within the gloomy depths of San Juan Canyon waged such a battle as had ne'er been fought there before.

Madly—determinedly—desperately fought

the defenders, Blonde Bill in the front, and the others close beside him.

"Great ham-bone, thet war ther bee-line fer old Joner! they've plugged it to yer leddy!" the Annihilator cried, in the blonde man's ear—then he turned to fire again into the swarming outlaw ranks.

Suddenly there was a wild, shrill scream, as of a mountain eagle.

Blonde Bill was kneeling beside the veiled woman.

But it was not his cry that echoed through the canyon.

Another had uttered the cry—the road-agents heard it—paused—hesitated—and then as if by unanimous consent, beat a precipitate retreat from the scene of the attack!

CHAPTER II

A QUEER STREET AUCTION

STRANGE was the scene, in all its details. First, the stage-coach, stopped in the gloomy canyon; next the defenders standing in bold relief upon the top; and lastly, the rapid fleeing of the Silent Tongues, in every accessible direction.

It was a tableau worthy of representation upon any theatre's boards, only here it was true to nature.

And, not least noticeable, was the blonde stranger, kneeling beside his wounded companion, the veiled lady, tears trickling down over his cheeks, from beneath the green goggles.

"Great ham-bone thet discombobberated ther terrestyal gravytation uv old Joner!" the Annihilator cried, springing forward, to the blonde man's side. "Hev they hurt yer leddy, pilgrim?"

"Yes!" was the husky reply; "may God's wrath be upon them—they have killed her."

"All aboard!" shouted La Carte, who, along with the minister and the Ohioan, had taken no part in the fight—"all aboard, who goes on the *Monitor*!"

"Stop!" the Sport, of the waxed moustache cried, covering the driver with a revolver. "Don't ye see we've got a dead lady here? Just you hold up if you please."

"Can't help if ye've got a dozen of 'em," La Carte replied, drawing up on the reins. "This 'ere stage hes got to go through on time!"

"Oh! it haz, haz it!" roared a stentorian voice, and the next minute the little Canadian found himself held high above the head of Beautiful Bill, supported horizontally by a pair of arms that never once quivered. "Oh! ye wull, wull ye?" the giant repeated,

with a malicious grin. "Oho! ye'd forgot thet Beauterful Bill was on deck, hadn't ye—I, ther great variegated, sweet-'cented Apoller o' ther West—the old original Pet Elerfant o' ther Leadville Trail—the left bower o' ther famuss Death Committee o' the Mines. Yas—ye'd forgot all about thet leetle fack, on course. Aire ye goin' ter start ther stage, ye ill-favoured son o' a polecat, ef I set ye onter yer feet ag'in?"

"Curse you, yes!" the Kanuck gritted savagely. "I'll tear yer heart out!"

"Bet yer pile ye lie!" the giant replied. "I'll fix you fer a coroner's inquest, an' drive ther stage myself."

The next instant the giant had hurled the Canadian half-way across the canyon, from the poise above his head, and he struck the hard ground with a dull thud, the sound of which seemed pregnant with a deadly meaning.

Blonde Bill turned to the Sport.

"What is your handle?" he asked, wiping the tears from his cheeks.

"They generally call me Rosebud Rob," the other replied, bowing.

The blonde man then started a trifle.

"I have heard of you," he said, extending his hand. "Will you hand me her," with a glance toward the dead lady, "when I get to the ground? I will bury her somewhere in this vicinity."

"I will assist you, certainly," Rosebud Rob replied.

The next instant Blonde Bill had climbed down from the stage-top to the ground, the passengers regarding him curiously.

Rosebud Rob then raised the inanimate form of the dead woman and handed it into the blonde man's extended arms, Bill receiving it with a simple bow as acknowledgment of his thanks.

"You may go ahead with the stage now," he said, addressing the giant, who stood erect in La Carte's seat, with whip and reins in hand.

Then Blonde Bill turned about and strode up the gulch, carrying the body of his dead companion in his strong arms.

The next instant the crack of the long-lashed whip was heard, and the stage rolled away down the canyon.

In an opposite course, Blonde Bill made his way for several moments; then paused and looked around.

As he did so, he found himself face to face with the Sport, Rosebud Rob.

"What! you here?" the blonde man exclaimed, in surprise.

"Yes—pardon the intrusion, but I had a curiosity to know more of a pilgrim that can shoot the way you can, and thought I might be of some assistance to you," the Sport re-

plied. "It didn't look fair to leave you alone to take care of the dead, and so I dropped off."

"I thank you, sincerely," Blonde Bill replied warmly. "I shall not forget your kindness."

He laid the body upon a plot of fresh, green grass, and bowed down before her and wept. Not in a loud, obtrusive way—the falling of a tear now and then, and a convulsive shaking of the form being all the symptoms perceptible of his terrible grief.

When he turned again to the Sport, all signs of his grief had vanished, save, mayhap, a trifle of paleness to his cheek.

"She was my wife," he said huskily; "and as true and faithful as an angel. May God gather her to his fold, and permit me to live that I may wreak vengeance upon her murderer! Come! let's bury her."

A little ravine branched off from the main canyon, and up this they carried the body, to a green, grassy slope, shaded by a green hemlock.

Then, with their knives, they dug out a grave of sufficient dimensions for the purpose intended, and wrapping a heavy blanket around the corpse, laid it in its last resting-place.

Sticks and boughs were then so arranged as to protect the body when the dirt was covered over; then the grave was filled by Rosebud Rob, while the blonde man knelt beside it, in silent prayer.

When the last of the dirt had been heaped over the remains, he arose and grasped the Sport's hand warmly.

"May God bless you for your kindness," he said, in a choked voice, "and put it in my power to amply repay you. Come; let us follow the stage on to Silverton. I will yet make this mining country too hot for these so-called Silent Tongues."

"Silverton, then, is your destination?" the Sport inquired.

"Yes—thereabouts. Ah! I must find the driver, La Carte, and get the key to the treasure-box of the stage, in which I have some money."

They debouched from the ravine into the Juan gulch, and a short walk brought them to where the driver of the *Monitor* still lay upon the ground.

"The big chap handled him rather rough," Rosebud Rob said, "and I allow that he won't drive any more stages, right away."

While Blonde Bill searched the Canadian's pockets, Rosebud made an examination of his injuries, and found that he was yet alive, but badly bruised, and stunned beyond immediate recovery.

"Ah! here are the keys," the blonde man said, rising, at last. "Now, if you are going

my way, come along. My game is to break up the Silent Tongues, and rid the Los Animas of some of its ruffianly and villainous element."

"Then you may count me in, too, providing you have no objections," Rosebud Rob answered. "I ain't no modern Sampson, ner I don't pretend to be a prime factor o' this world's arithmatick; but ef there's any fun on hand ye'll ginerally find me a man to suit all circumstances."

"Then you are the very man I want for a pard," Blonde Bill answered, with decision.

Silverton, Colorado.

The lively little town of the San Juan mountain districts—the Pride of the Animas.

No city or pretensions thereto, this town of Silverton, with its mountainous main street of business places, and shanties and cabins dotted about without any attempt at regularity.

Yet it had an enormous floating population, and is considered one of the roughest places in Southwestern Colorado.

On the early evening of the day succeeding the bold attempt of the Silent Tongues to rob the stage in San Juan valley, two persons rode down the busy main street of Silverton, mounted upon a pair of *burros* of the ugliest possible appearance.

One of the persons was a young woman or maiden of perhaps eighteen years of age—a prettily proportioned girl, with an equally pretty face of a decidedly independent type, relieved by a pair of saucy brown eyes, and a mouth that could relax from gravity to a broad smile, in a single instant. Her hair was of extreme length, as it fell in an auburn wave over her shoulders, and was crowned by a jaunty straw hat. Her riding habit, although coarse, was also neat and tasty.

Her companion was a swarthy man of forty-five, with jet-black hair and beard, and features of a most repulsive cast. His dress was rough and greasy, and a small arsenal of weapons occupied his belt.

As this strangely contrasted couple rode through the street, general attention was turned upon them by the crowds of men who peopled the busy thoroughfare, and more than once the name of "Salamander Sam," was spoken by resident Silvertonians.

The girl, it was discovered, was bound to the saddle, and her hands were secured behind her back, clearly proving that she was a prisoner in the hands of the swarthy ruffian.

For Salamander Sam was a ruffian of the boldest type, and was feared by one and all throughout the Animas mines.

A never-failing dead shot, and a person who had no fear of man or God, he was a

desperate customer to "rile," as many a conceited pilgrim had learned to his cost.

Involuntarily the busy tide that surged in the main street, turned and followed the course of the two riders, when it was discovered that the ruffian's companion was bound, for it was of course anticipated that there would be developments in the case.

Straight down the street rode the ruffian, until he came to a large shanty designated by a sign: "Hotel," when he drew rein upon his own and the maiden's horses.

In a moment thereafter a dense crowd had collected around them inquiringly.

At first the ruffian gazed at them fiercely, without any seeming disposition to speak, but after awhile he rose in his stirrups, and cried:

"My name's Salamander Sam, pilgrims, ef ye don't know me, an' I've come down here ter sell this yere gal at auction ter ther highest bidder. She's my darter, is Dashin' Dol, an' I opine ef I want ter sell her, that's my bizness. She ar' a tricky beast, an' last night she tried ter carve me wi' a dagger, but et didn't work. I happened ter be a leetle ther spriest, an' cotched her at it. So now, feller-citizens, ef enny o' ye want 'er, jest give me a startin' bid. How much do I hear, neow?"

"Gentlemen, for the love of God, rescue me from this ruffian's power," the girl cried, pleadingly. "He is a bad, wicked man, and I only defended myself. Help me, I pray!"

"Shet up, will ye?" Salamander Sam roared, whipping a pair of revolvers from his belt and cocking them. "Ef ye doan't want me ter sodder ye, jest keep mum. I'm master o' these sarymonies, I am, an' I'm goin' ter sell ye ter ther highest bidder. How much'll ye give fer her, boyees—how much, now, hoss an' all? Durst ary man start 'er at any price? Gal an' hoss! how much do I heer now, fer ther goodwill an' fictures—sole right and title—how much, now?"

"I'll give ye five dollars fer ther *burro*," said a brutal-looking Kentuckian. "Don't want ther petticoater at no price."

"Hoss an' gal must go tergether!" announced Salamander Sam. "Five dollars I'm bid, pilgrims—five dollars I'm bid—who makes et ten? Jest think, a fu'st class *burro* an' a gal, as purty as a posey—an' five dollars all I'm offered. Why, ye durned galoots, ther gal's wu'th a ten, ter say nothing about ther gol-durned *burro*!"

"I will give you a hundred dollars for the girl," a man said, as he stepped forward—a stranger, by the way, and no less a party than the Honourable Ray Vernon, of Ohio!

CHAPTER III

MISS VAN SYCKEL'S WARNING

SEVERAL hours after the termination of the street scene, introducing the peculiar auction of Salamander Sam, a man stood upon the veranda of the Leviathan Hotel, which, by the way, is Silverton's principal hostelry.

He was leaning carelessly against one of the wooden supporting columns, in a way that betrayed ease and grace combined.

The man was Blonde Bill.

He was clad in a faultless costume of spotless duck, with patent leathers of elegant fit upon his feet, and a jaunty wool hat upon his blonde head.

He appeared to be enjoying the busy scene upon the street, for it was yet early evening, and the whole population of the lovely little town seemed to be abroad.

As he was standing thus, two persons came down the street, and passed the hotel. The one was Rosebud Rob, the Sport, and the other was a girl, attired in male garb throughout—a wildly handsome creature, with dusky, passionate eyes, a mouth of sweet expression, and a mass of wavy brown hair, which blew unconfined over her shoulder.

Her attire was of serviceable white cassimere, but neatly-fitting, and showing to good advantage her finely-contoured form; a slouch hat, jauntily turned up, ornamented her curls, and the knee-boots she wore were of the daintiest pattern.

The Sport was in advance, and evidently not accompanying the girl, if indeed he knew her, which was not probable.

As he caught a glimpse of her, a strange start came over Blonde Bill, and he half started forward, only to step back again, a resolute expression settling around his mouth.

"Did you think you knew the woman?"

The words were addressed to him, plain enough, and he turned to find another young woman standing by his side, which she had reached without his hearing her.

She was richly attired in a stylish and costly street costume, consisting of a fine silk walking-dress, a knit shawl, and prettily-trimmed hat, and Blonde Bill had no difficulty in recognizing her as the young lady who had accompanied the minister at the time of the stage robbery.

"Ah! excuse me," he said, doffing his hat with a gallant bow; "were you speaking to me, lady?"

The minister's daughter nodded with a piquant smile.

"Yes," she said, pleasantly, "I was

asking you if you knew the bold creature in male attire?"

"If my memory does not belie me, I think I have met her before," Blonde Bill replied. "Why do you ask, pray?"

"Oh! merely because I saw you start at sight of her, and partly, perhaps, for an excuse to introduce myself," was the frank, laughing reply. "I saw you standing here, and wanted to ask you how is the lady who was shot?"

"She is dead, miss—was dead, ere I left the stage."

"Was she a friend of yours, then?"

"As near as ever friend could be—my wife," the blonde man replied, a trifle huskily. "You are the minister's daughter I take it?"

"Yes, sir; my name is Nora Van Syckel. Yours is—"

"Blonde Bill, at your service."

The young woman nodded, and glanced hurriedly around her, as if fearful of being seen in the blonde man's company.

There chanced to be no one else upon the veranda, at the time, and she seemed relieved.

"Will you come with me into the hotel?" she asked. "I would speak with you, in private, if you have no objections to listening to me."

"Certainly, lady. If I can be of any service to you, you may command me of course."

"Then, follow me," she said, re-entering the hotel from the veranda.

She then led the way up the broad staircase to a private parlour upon the second floor, Blonde Bill following her and accepting the seat she offered him.

"It won't take me long to tell you what I want of you," she said, as she swept to and fro, over the carpet. "I have taken it upon myself, as my duty, to warn you that you are a marked man in this town, and that the sooner you take your leave the safer it will be for you."

"What do you mean? Why am I marked—and a total stranger in the town, at that?" the blonde man cried, in surprise.

"I cannot tell you that, sir—no more than that there exists throughout the mining districts of San Juan county, a bold and lawless gang of ruffians, who style themselves the Silent Tongues, and who rule these towns, literally, for once they take a dislike to a man, he has to leave—if not of his own free will, by *theirs*! I overheard a bit of conversation awhile ago, which led me to believe that a plot was on foot to rid the town of your presence, and I took the liberty to bring you here, and put you on your guard."

"For which act of kindness on your part I

am deeply grateful," Blonde Bill said, warmly.

"One question I would ask you, that you may be able to answer—who is the commander of these Silent Tongues?"

"That, sir, I do not know, except that he is called Captain Terrible, which, of course, is but a *nom de plume* to screen another name."

"Undoubtedly. I will bear your warning in mind, and look out for the Silent Tongues. Already I owe them a debt of vengeance, which shall be paid in blood."

Then the blonde man rose to depart.

"I should be pleased to have you call again, sir, when papa is at home," Miss Van Syckel said, accompanying him to the door.

"I am somewhat a stranger in these parts myself, having recently returned from school in the East, and of course have made but few eligible acquaintances, having taken no particular fancy to the rougher class of citizens."

"Perhaps I shall find it convenient to do so," Blonde Bill replied. "If you learn anything more concerning the Silent Tongues, that might concern me, I should be pleased to have you let me know, as I generally like to rake in all the points on the board, when practicable."

Then, with a smile, Blonde Bill bowed himself gallantly out of the presence of the minister's daughter, and betook himself to the street.

Let us return to the street scene.

The bid of the Ohioan elicited a murmur of surprise from the crowd, and seemed to please Salamander Sam greatly.

"Thar now, ye durned galoots, here's one pilgrim as ain't afeard ter bid on ther gal!" he roared. "Keep ther ball in motion now—keep 'er a-goin', I tell ye! A hundred dollars I've got—a hundred I'm offered, fer ther gal an' *burro*! Whar's ther pilgrim w'ot makes et two hundred—a hundred an' fifty—one an' a quarter? Going at a hundred—who makes et two?"

"I'll make it two hundred," exclaimed a voice, and Rosebud Rob stepped forward.

"Two hundred I'm offered—two hundred," shouted the ruffian. "Who sees me three?"

"Here," replied the portly Ohioan, eyeing the helpless girl with a gaze that caused her to shudder, so full of villainous significance was it.

"Three hundred—three I've got—four I want! Keep 'er b'ilin', gents!" cried the auctioneer. "She's a gud'un, is ther gal, 'cept she's inclined ter be a little sassy, an' aren't afeard ter carve a feller when her dander's up. Three I've got—who'll make it four?"

"I will," Rosebud Rob said, with as much coolness as though he were bidding off a goldmine instead of a lovely girl.

"I'll make it five, then," the Ohioan said, promptly, with a scowl at his opponent. "I'll have the girl, young man, at any price—so you may as well stop bidding."

"Maybe you'll get her, and again, maybe ye won't," the Sport coolly replied. "It depends somewhat on which of us has the biggest pile."

A titter from the crowd at this juncture caused the Ohioan to mutter an execration.

"Who are you?" he demanded, angrily. "You will please use more respect in addressing your superiors, sir."

"Oh! I will, will I? Undoubtedly, sir, when I find them!" Rosebud responded with a mocking bow.—"As to who I am, I am generally called Rosebud Rob, from a habit I have of always wearing a rosebud in my buttonhole, when I am able to get one. Auctioneer, I'll see you fifty better on the last bid."

"Five-fifty I have—five-fifty, gents; who will make it six? Six! six! who'll make it six! Going at five hundred and fifty dollars; who'll make it six?"

"Hillo, heer—hillo, ye gol-durn mules! Git out o' ther way, an' make way for ther great Dubble-j'inted, Patent Adjustable Death Committee o' the Mines—the reg'lar roarin' antediluvian disaster o' the Animas; the sky-scrapin' Centenyal Insurrective Investergation Board uv ther San Won! Heer we cum a-boomin', an' we do desire ter stick our paw in this yere purtickler pie. Cum erlong, Avalanche, ye gol-durned no-ear Annihilator, and let's take a peep at ther critter."

And following the words came the big man from Leadville, elbowing his way through the crowd, closely accompanied by the Annihilator.

"Going—going—going!—who makes et six? Where's the man as durst offer me six hundred dollars fer ther *burro*, wi' ther gal throw'd in?" cried Salamander Sam.

"Harkee! Great ham-bone, ef they ain't sellin' a gal at auction," exclaimed Avalanche. "Bill, thet ain't a squar' deal!"

"No sir-ee! bob-tail horse—thet ain't no fair kinder shake," the giant cried, indignantly. "When wimmen cum ter be sold like sheep, I reckon et's high time fer ther Death Committee ter show a tooth er two, dog my mother-in-law's old Thomas cat, ef I don't!"

"Say, see heer, ye durned black-ha'ed, stoop-shouldered, lantern-jawed, slab-sided, disgustin' specimen o' humanity, d'ye see me? I'm Beautiful Bill, I am, an' this yere

snoozer he be Old Avalanche, an' we two constitute ther Death Committee o' ther Mines. Jest gaze at us. An' now, durn yer cats, we, ther aforesaid Death Committee, want ter know w'ot bizness you've got makin' a' auktion hyar, uv a gal!"

"Et's my gal, an' ef I wanter sell 'er, I'm goin' to do et!" savagely replied Salamander Sam. "This ain't none o' yer funeral, old man, an' ef ye don't want me ter make a tunnel through you, jest ye close yer valve. D'ye heer!"

"Do we heer?" the giant replied, with a leer; "on course we do, an' ef ye'll git down off'n thet burro, an' waltz over hyar ter my embrace, I'll hug ye ter death in less time 'n takes an Injun ter smell tarant'ler. Don't fret—right hyar wull ther Death Committee wait until ye git ready ter purceed ter biz."

"Six hundred and fifty dollars," cried Rosebud Rob, at this juncture.

"Seven hundred," added the Ohioan, fiercely.

"Eight hundred," sung out the Sport, who was now backed, or rather urged on, by Blonde Bill, who stood at his side.

"Nine hundred!" from the Ohioan, followed by a vindictive curse.

"A square thousand I'll make it!" the Sport cried, coolly, while the situation momentarily grew more and more exciting.

Such a street scene had never before been drawn upon fair Silverton's record—such an incident was not to be found in this history of San Juan county, averred these Animites; wherefore their interest.

The most attention was bestowed upon the dandyish Sport, of the waxed moustache, for self-assurance excites admiration, in any crowd. And evidently the Sport was as cool as he appeared, as also was the blonde man who stood by his side.

Honourable Ray Vernon claimed to be a Congressman, from Ohio, travelling in the West for his health; but if this be true, the state of excitement he gradually worked himself into could not particularly conduce to his recovery.

Angrier and angrier, if possible, he grew, at the opposition offered by the Sport for he was determined to possess the girl, Dashing Dolly, and every raise offered by the Sport meant so many more dollars out of his pockets.

"Come, gents, keep 'er a-goin'," shouted Salamander Sam, with a grin of satisfaction.

"Ten-fifty," bid the Ohioan.

"Eleven I make'r," from the Sport.

"Eleven-fifty I'll give."

"Fifty better I'll see ye."

"Curse you, you vagabond, do you mean to run the girl up to a million?" the Congressman cried fiercely.

"Perhaps, if I see fit," Rosebud returned. "You'll generally find me a man to suit all circumstances, an' I propose to see you a better, bid what you may."

An oath from Vernon was indicative of his feelings.

"There is no use of fooling," he said, savagely. "I'll have the girl in spite of you. I'll give five thousand dollars for the girl, cash down!"

"Well, then you put me under obligations to see you better," the Sport said, with a smile.

"I'll bid ten thousand dollars for her, and give her her freedom!"

A murmur of astonishment ran through the crowd, for this was the grittiest bidding they had ever known.

"Ther feller wi' ther waxed moustache is a brick, durn my old mulé's left hind fut ef he ain't!" declared Beautiful Bill, approvingly.

"Great ham-bone, yes," assented the Annihilator. "I've heerd o' him, afore. But, 'tain't his cash w'at's buyin' ther gal. Ther blonde galoot's his backer."

This was evident to all the spectators, for the blonde stranger occasionally nudged the Sport to raise the bid.

"Well, my friend, are you through?" Rosebud Rob demanded, when the Ohioan did not raise the bid. "Can't you see ten thousand in the girl?"

"No, curse you, but I'll make this job cost you dearly, before you're through with me."

"Cum, young feller, let's hev yer swag, an' ye can hev Dashing Dolly," Salamander Sam cried. "I'm anxious ter slope, afore ther gal gits free."

"Hold on! afore ye slope, I've got 'er leetle ackount ter settle wi' you!" Beautiful Bill reminded, "an' we may as well settle right heer, as ennywhar."

CHAPTER IV

DEADWOOD DICK PUTS IN AN APPEARANCE

THE giant meant business, evidently, for right there in the centre of Silverton's main street, he stripped off his jacket, and rolled up the sleeves upon a pair of monster arms, in a way that was very suggestive, to say the least.

A murmur of admiration escaped the spectators at the sight of the whip-like cords and heavy muscles upon the giant's limbs. Salamander Sam saw them, and scowled darkly, for, ruffian and bully though he was, he at once felt that he had met a man for whom he was no match.

"Jest luk at me, wull ye," Beautiful Bill

roared, prancing about in a very undignified series of positions. "Jest feast yer optics onter me, wull ye—me, ther famuss statter uv ther Goddess o' Liberty—ther father o' my kintry. Cum an' hug me, once, if you dare—if ye *dare*, ye black-whiskered son uv a buffler."

"It is useless to waste your breath on him," Dashing Dolly cried, addressing the giant. "He is a bigger coward at heart than a coyote, and there's no fight in him."

"You lie, cuss ye!" Salamander Sam cried, fiercely. "Thar's no man as walks w'ot I am afeard of."

"Then, fer ther luv of Heaving, jest cum an' see yer unkle!" implored the giant.

But Salamander Sam made no move to respond; and seizing the package of bills handed him by Blonde Bill, he jabbed the spurs into his animal's side, and shot away down the street like the wind.

"Gol-durn my old mule's left hind fut!" blustered the giant. "Ef I was a good-fer-shucks on hossback, I'd foller thet galoot, an' dust his jacket, I would. But et ain't no use o' chasin' chain lightnin' on fut. Whar's ther feller w'ot owns ther gal?"

"Here is the man," Rosebud Rob said, indicating the blonde stranger who stood by his side.

"I was only the bidder—he was the backer, and consequently own his purchase."

"You mistake my motives, Sport," Blonde Bill said, stepping forward. "I take pleasure in presenting the young lady with her liberty. It was for that purpose I backed your bids."

A murmur of applause escaped the lips of the spectators, and Dashing Dolly gazed at the blonde man, tears springing to her eyes:

"I am sorry I have only the grateful thanks of a friendless waif to offer you," she said, modestly. "I—I—"

"Do not consider yourself under the least obligation to me," Blonde Bill replied. "It was simply to prevent your falling into villainous hands that I interfered, and it was no more than any man would have done!"

"Then, sir, you mean to infer that I had villainous motives in bidding on the girl?" the Ohioan sharply demanded, striding up before the blonde man.

"I do, sir," was the cool response. "The way you gazed at her was sufficient guarantee of your base designs, had you got her in your power."

"You lie, sir—you lie like a Ute!" the Congressman cried, furiously, and he raised his clinched hand threateningly.

But if it was his intention to strike the blonde man, his plan was frustrated, for he

suddenly found his wrist caught in a vice-like grip, in the powerful hand of the Leadville giant.

"See hyar, no ye don't, my gay rooster!" the Pet Elephant cried, with a chuckle. "Goin' ter punch ther blonde pilgrim was ye? But got fooled, didn't ye? An' gol-durn my mother-in-law's pet Thomas cat ef ye ain't got ter git down on yer knees an' apolergize ter my cinnamon ha' red namesake, or I'll make a cadaver outer you quicker'n a lightnin'-bug ever got skeart at thunder!"

"Don't bother the man, on my account, pard," Blonde Bill said, turning away. "He'll never harm anybody."

Beautiful Bill reluctantly let go his hold on the Ohioan's arm, seeming to regard the blonde man's will as his law. "Ye may thank yer boots ye git off so cheap," he muttered. "Next time ther Death Committee will tend ter yer case."

The crowd now began to disperse.

Blonde Bill had gone, and taken away the chances of a street fight, and so there was nothing more for these Silvertonians to wait for. The Ohioan also took his departure, as soon as released by the giant, being glad to escape punishment at the Pet Elephant's hands.

As Dashing Dolly still remained bound to her *burro*, Rosebud Rob now stepped forward and cut her bonds, and then assisted her to dismount.

"Have you any friends or acquaintances here, to whom I could conduct you?" he asked.

"None," was the reply. "I have not a friend in the world."

"Say not so, young lady. Two at least will act as your friends, with your permission—Blonde Bill and myself."

"I thank you, sir, but I could not think of accepting the hospitality of two utter strangers. If you will show me a good hotel, I will see if I cannot get employment there, as help. I think by trying I might be able."

Accordingly, Rosebud Rob accompanied her to the Leviathan, and found and introduced her to the proprietor. He then stepped aside and waited until he got an opportunity to speak with the gentleman himself, whose name was Colonel Arthur.

"Did you hire the young lady?" he asked, intercepting the colonel.

"Well, no—not exactly," was the surprised reply. "I sent her to the parlour to await my answer."

"You take her—give her some light and desirable employment. I'll settle the bill," the Sport said.

"You?" the colonel demanded.

"Exactly. I've plenty of cash, and it won't hurt me to look after the friendless."

If you want a recommend, go ask Blonde Bill if Rosebud Rob is not all right."

"Oh! yes, I see. You're the blonde man's friend, eh? Well, that's all the recommend I need. The young lady shall be properly cared for."

"Thanks. If a man who calls himself Honourable Ray Vernon offers to molest her, fire him out, at my expense."

"I'll see to it, sir," the colonel replied, turning away. "The self-styled Congressman is no particular favourite of mine."

About the same hour that evening, when Blonde Bill was closeted with Nora Van Syckel, the Honourable Ray Vernon, of Ohio, entered a notorious gambling palace, not far from the Leviathan.

The saloon, which was known as the "Monaco," was filled with miners, citizens, and gamblers, when the Ohioan entered, but he crowded his way along until he chanced to find a vacant chair and table.

He at once ordered a bottle of wine, and proceeded to do justice to it, while he smoked a cigar, and gazed upon the strangely exciting scene around him.

He had not been seated more than half an hour, when a man entered, and approached the vacant seat opposite the Congressman.

He was a burly individual, clad in mud-splashed garments of coarse materials, and his face, what was not hidden beneath an immense bushy red beard, was shaded by the broad rim of a slouch hat. The butts of a pair of heavy cavalry pistols peeped out of the tops of his knee-boots, and another pair of Colt's trusty revolvers were thrust into the belt about his waist.

Without invitation he took the vacant chair, and gazed at the Ohioan for several minutes in a rude stare.

"You are Ray Vernon, ain't ye?" he finally demanded.

"That is my name," the Congressman replied, coldly.

"Tho't so," was the reply. "You're ther feller w'ot claims ter hev bought out ther mines, below heer, I reckon?"

"I am supposed to be the owner of the Deadwood Dick's Discovery mines," the other assented. "Why do you ask?"

"Because, ef yu're ther chap, ye've undertook a bad job. Deadwood Dick didn't sell you the mines."

"He didn't?"

"No, sir-ee! You met him up in Leadville, didn't ye?"

"I did."

"Ye offered ter buy him out, didn't ye?"

"I did."

"But ye didn't make the purchase, in a fair way?"

The Ohioan scowled.

"Why did I not?" he demanded, with some fierceness.

"I'll tell ye," the red-whiskered party said, lowering his tone. "Ye made Deadwood Dick an offer, which he declined. Then you asked to see ther deed to ther claim. He show'd thet to ye, an' ye examined it. While purtendin' ter reflect you asked him ter drink, an' ordered a bottle of wine and glasses. When ther wine came Deadwood Dick refused ter drink wine, and you asked him ef he wouldn't exchange ther wine fer sars'p'rilla. This he consented to do, an' while he was gone you dropped a sleeping potion inter his glass. When the drink came you hastily filled his glass, an' he didn't notice the powder when he drank it. In five minutes he war asleep, an' you made off wi' ther deed o' ther Discovery claim."

The Ohioan uttered an impatient oath, as he listened.

"How do you know this?" he demanded.

"I know it," the stranger replied, "because—because *I am Deadwood Dick*, and have come for that deed!"

And as he spoke, he made a quick motion toward his feet, and the next instant held a pair of cocked revolvers in hand.

Gold-mounted tools they were, of great beauty, and their deadly muzzles stared the Ohioan in the face.

"Curse you!" he gasped, growing white in an instant. "Put aside your weapons. What do you mean?"

"I mean business," the ex-outlaw said, with fierce resolve. "I don't generally mean anything else, when I grip such tools as these. You can give me back the deed to Deadwood Dick's Discovery, or I shall be forced to shet up yer shop, at once."

"I haven't got the deed—I didn't take it," was the parleying reply.

"You lie!" Dick replied, coolly; "you stole it, and I demand it, or your life!"

"Put up your weapons first, then."

"Oh, no. You can't come that. The 'boys' won't harm you, if you dish over the deed, in right good grace."

"What if I refuse to do it?"

"Then I shall make it necessary for crape to be hung on your door."

"Bah! you dare not kill me here. You'd be strung up before the smoke had cleared away."

The Buckeye Congressman was beginning to manifest a little more assurance.

"Humph! It is plain you do not know me," the ex-road prince said, dryly. "If you have any doubts as to my being able to back my word, I'll give you a little illustration, free of charge."

"No! no!" Vernon said, quickly. "You

needn't mind. I'll give you up the deed; but, understand you, it is merely because I choose, as I have no fear of you. Did I deem it best, the simple announcement from my lips that you were the famous outlaw, Deadwood Dick, would bring the crowd down upon you, for I understand these Silver-tonians have no love for you."

"Perhaps not," was the indifferent reply, "and it is likely their love will be less, ere they hear the last of me. As you say, it might be somewhat to my indisposition, were my presence here generally known. Therefore, unless you crave a coffin, you'd better keep mum. Come! I am ready for the deed, so be lively, as our striking appearance of friendliness toward one another is beginning to attract attention."

"The deed is at my hotel. You will have to come there for it," the Ohioan said.

"Very well. Rise and move toward the door, and I will follow you. Make one treacherous move, and I'll put an air-hole through you on time. Remember who is behind you!"

Vernon arose with a scowl, and pushed his way toward the door through the crowd.

Close at his heels followed Deadwood Dick, in his clever disguise, and the formidable pair of revolvers he held in his hands were an incentive that caused the crowd involuntarily to make way for him.

Out into the crowded main street of the little mountain town they went, the ex-outlaw now shoving his weapons into his jacket pockets out of sight, but in such a way that he could fire at the Ohioan as well as before.

Down the street they went, toward the Leviathan Hotel, without any one knowing their peculiar relations to each other.

The Ohioan was in a rage at himself for thus being forced to obey the will of the outlaw, but he had heard so many stories of the dare-devil Deadwood Dick, that he was fearful of the consequences of disobeying.

Finally they reached the Leviathan, and ascended the steps to the veranda.

Watching his chance, the Ohioan made a sudden dive through a side door, as they entered the broad hallway, and raising his voice, shouted:

"Help! help! Stop the red-whiskered devil, for he is the accursed outlaw, Deadwood Dick!"

CHAPTER V

CALAMITY AND AVALANCHE

THE cry of the Ohioan rang loudly through the hall and bar-room of the hotel, and he rushed through the latter, and esconced himself in a closet, used for storing liquors.

He was fearful that Deadwood Dick would follow him, and thought only of his personal safety.

Those who had occupied the bar-room, at the moment of his entrance, drew their revolvers, apprehensively, for enough of the name and notoriety of Deadwood Dick had they heard, to know that revolvers were necessary when he came.

But, though they stood with bated breath, the famous ex-outlaw did not appear as expected.

Instead of boldly braving their wrath, he evidently had taken the opportunity to escape.

A hasty search was made of the lower part of the hotel, and upon the street, but no person with red whiskers could be found.

Learning this, Ohio's Congressman, the Honourable Ray Vernon, emerged from his temporary place of refuge, and proceeded first of all to gargle his throat with hot Scotch, at the bar, to steady his nerves.

He had been thoroughly frightened at his own temerity, and was yet pale and agitated to such an extent that he trembled perceptibly.

"Kinder skeart, weren't ye?" a miner asked, when he found himself able once more to walk about, bravely. "Hain't much used ter havin' road-agents a-taggin' at yer heels I reckon?"

"No, curse the fellow. He had me covered by a pair of six-shooters, and I had to dodge lively to get out of his reach," the Ohioan replied, with a scowl. "Which way did he go—how did he escape?"

"Thet 'pears ter be somethin' nobody don't know how ter ans'er," the miner replied.

"Here's Calamity Jane! she's one o' Deadwood Dick's old flames—mebbe she could tell ye."

The Congressman turned his gaze sharply upon the famous girl dare-devil of the mines, who had just sauntered into the bar-room—the same nobbily attired party whom Blonde Bill, not a great while before, had seen going down the street.

"You say that person is a woman?" Vernon demanded of the miner.

"On course she is," was the reply. "That's Calamity Jane, ther gal w'ot ain't afeard o' no man that evyer rode a mule—no sir-ee, not she! Knowed *her* up in Deadwood an' Leadville."

"And you say she is a friend of Deadwood Dick, the outlaw?"

"Waal, I reckon; leastways, she used to be. They do tell me that she'd hev'im in a minnit, ef he'd hev her."

"Humph!" the Ohioan said, eyeing the

girl dare-devil with a sharp scrutiny. "I'd like to know her—introduce me."

"No, sir-ee!" the miner declared, promptly. "Ter interdooce a stranger ter a gal, out in this land, means ter vouch for his bein' all squar', an' I ain't on ther vouch ter-night, especially w'en Calamity Jane is around, an' her pistol arm 'pears ter be in good workin' order. Thar's Blonde Bill, stranger, mebbe c'u'd tell ye w'ich way Deadwood Dick went, ef ye're so anxious ter foller him."

"I do not care to receive information from that man," the Ohioan gritted, flashing a glance at the handsome, airy blonde man, who had just sauntered into the great bar-room. "He is a liar, a rascal, and a meddlesome villain."

He followed the girl sport, Calamity Jane, until he found an opportunity to excuse himself in her presence, for his temerity in addressing her, with the gallantry of a thoroughly polished man of the world.

"You will please excuse me," he said; "but on learning that you were a friend of the ex-outlaw, Deadwood Dick, I could not refrain from addressing you, and begging permission to ask you a few questions."

The girl gazed at him keenly through her steady, dusky orbs, as if making a rapid analysis of the man.

"Well, go ahead," she said, calmly. "If ye propound ennything I feel like answerin', most likely ye'll heer from me, and ef ye don't, I'm as mum as a clam in his shell."

"Very well. They tell me you once wanted to wed this Deadwood Dick, but he wouldn't have you. It was a bitter insult to as pretty a girl as you. Has there not risen in your heart a revengeful spirit, against this road-agent—would you not like to get square with him, on the old score, if you were paid well for it?"

The Ohioan bent toward her, his eyes gleaming like those of a tiger about to spring upon its prey. It was easy to see that he meant business—that for Deadwood Dick he cherished a deadly hatred.

Calamity Jane gazed at him for a moment, as if in great surprise; then a wild laugh burst from her lips.

"You consummate villainous puppy," she said, jerking a revolver from her belt. "I've ten kinds of a notion to blow the hull roof of yer skull off, fer your audacity. Begone, sir, before I get nervous and pull the trigger!"

"But hold! you must hear me through. I will pay you well to put this Deadwood Dick out of my way—a thousand dollars—two thousand, even!"

"Bah! a hundred thousand would not

hire Calamity Jane to strike a true and tried friend!" the girl replied, scornfully. "You mistake me, Sir Villain. I am no tool or hireling to be tempted by a paltry offer of gold. Go, sir, before I make a bullet hole in yer head. I'm famous at it, once I am r'iled."

The Honourable Ray Vernon slunk away, with a vindictive curse.

After he had taken his leave, Calamity Jane left the bar-room, and ascended the stairs to the first floor of the hotel, where her room was located.

Entering it, she closed the door behind her, and seated herself at a window overlooking the busy main street of the town.

"Deadwood Dick is down in this district," she murmured, watching the many moving figures in the moonlit street below, "and he is again in danger. He was here in this very hotel to-night, and yet I did not know it, till he had come and gone. I wonder if he knows of the danger that threatens him?"

"Calamity!"

She started violently, and turned.

A man stood before her—not Deadwood Dick, as she had expected on hearing her name spoken—not the famous ex-outlaw, but one whom the dare-devil girl recognized, for all—Old Avalanche.

The veteran Annihilator of old times, but now growing rapidly infirm.

"Avalanche! can it be true that this is you?" the girl cried, springing forward to grasp his horny hand. "I should sooner have expected to see the Old Nick!"

"Or, Deadwood Dick," the old scout replied, with his old-time peculiar chuckle. "Yes, C'lamity, et's ther old Disaster o' ther Nor'-west, sure pop—ther great Annihilation, minus Florence Night-in-a-gale an' Prudence Cordeliar, but merged inter ther Death Committee o' the Mines—w'ich be me an' Beautiful Bill."

"I am glad to see you, Alva," Jane said, warmly. "They are all strangers, here, ye know, an' an old face is better than a cooked dinner. What evyer brought you down here?"

"Great ham-bone, C'lamity, what ked hev ever fetched me 'cept ter help ther b'ye, Deadwood Dick. I heerd as how they war mistreatin' him, down hyar, an' so I j'ined wi' Bill, an' we rid down on a terrific zephyr o' demolition, to lend a helpin' hand."

"Have you seen Deadwood Dick?"

"No, but I hev heerd frum him. He sw'ars he'll make it lively hereabouts ef they don't let him alone."

"Which I honour him for. They tell me the roughs from here drove him off his Discovery, down the Animas."

"Yas, so they did. He discovered gold

thar first, about a month ago, staked out his claim, an' got it recorded. So, ye see, et's his, fair shake. But the roughs war too much fer him, an' he had ter pull out."

"Who are the two strangers—Rosebud Rob and Blonde Bill?" asked Calamity.

"Dunno much about ther blonde pilgrim, by ther great ham-bone. He be er sorter enigma, be thet galoot—sort o' king o' ther mines, fer et is reported he kerries more wealth about his togs nor Julius Ceaser. Ther t'other chap he be Rosebud Rob—a cuss on wheels, once ye set him a-goin', I've heerd say."

"Bet high on that!" Calamity said, with a nod. "Ye can allus tell a good cayuse by ther slumberin' fire in his eye, Alva. Hark!"

Both became silent and listened. From the streets below arose the sounds of a great hubbub, as of many voices and hurrying feet.

"Great ham-bone, thet paralyzed old Joner! w'at's up now?" The Annihilator demanded, excitedly. "Thar's some circus afoot, I'll bet a plug o' terbaccer. Cum! let's go down an' see what's ther rip!"

They accordingly hastened from the room, and down the stairs to the veranda of the Leviathan.

Below, in the street, hundreds of people were collected in the bright moonlight, forming a circle around two persons who stood facing each other in an antagonistic attitude.

One of them was the ruffian, Salamander Sam, and the other the Leadville giant, Beautiful Bill.

There they stood, the latter stripped to his waist, while the former had not as yet removed a dud.

"Cum! ye gol-durned Rocky Mountain tarant'ler! ye ornery sweet-'cented pole-cat! ef ye've got er single spark o' vitality or manliness erbout ye, squar' yerself, an' waltz right up! Don't ye see I'm waitin' wi' all the lamb-like docilerty an' patience uv old Job's gobbler?" the giant roared, dancing about, as if he were upon nettles.

"I ain't agoin' ter fight," the Salamander replied, with an oath. "You're a bigger man than I, an' I ain't anxious ter get knocked outer time."

"Ba-a-a!" roared the giant, who had evidently been indulging, to some extent. "Ye don't mean ter tell me thet ye aire actooally afeard o' me, ther Sarytogy-trunked, ivory-tusked Apoller o' ther Nor'west—the sweet-'cented Pet Elerfant o' ther Leadville Trail—the statteresk Pride o' ther Animas?"

"I have said that I wouldn't fight you," Salamander Sam replied, sullenly. "You are a giant, and I am not. Put up some

other pilgrim, and I'll fight, an' show ye how ter fill a coffin in first-class style."

"Kerwhoop! thet's ther tork," the giant cried, pausing to glare around him. "Whar's ther pilgrim o' pigminyan size as durst step for'a'd an' thrash ther conceit out o' ther feller w'ot auctioned off ther gal this afternoon. I've hunted him up—I, Beautiful Bill, ther Pet Elerfant—an' a hundred dollars hev I right heer in my breeches pocket fer ther galoot as kin lick Salamander Sam. Who'll take ther offer, now—whar's the man?"

"Here!" a voice exclaimed, and to the surprise of all, forward into the ring stepped the new king of the mines, Blonde Bill!

CHAPTER VI

A STREET FIGHT AND AN ACCUSATION

A MURMUR of surprise ran through the crowd, as the blonde man stepped forward into the ring.

Somehow, in the short time he had been in the little mining town, the report had got abroad that he was a sort of financial king, and that he, with all his prepossessing elegance of manner and dress, should desire to participate in the street fight, was past the understanding of the average Silver-tonian.

Especially was Calamity Jane surprised, as she stood with Old Avalanche upon the veranda of the Leviathan.

"The blonde pilgrim is on his muscle, ain't he?" she said, enthusiastically. "I thought he wasn't no slouch the minute I set my eyes onter him, an' I kinder warmed terward him. Bet a cayuse he'll scoop et to ther ruff, fine."

"Dunno orbout thet," Avalanche replied. "Et depends how they fight. I've seen sum o' them dandy chaps w'ot couldn't lick a de'd buzzard, an' then ag'in, sum on 'em aire mighty peart. Thet ar' Salamander Sam is a tough nugget ter handle, they say, an' I'll bet a half-eagle wi' any pilgrim thet he licks the blonde man."

"Well, uncle, I hate to take a mean advantage of an old snoozer, but ef ye wantar bet that way, I can accommodate you," and Rosebud Rob stepped up to where Calamity and the Annihilator were standing.

"Great ham-bone thet agitated ther larynx of old Joner! Et's you, is et?" Avalanche exclaimed, surveying the Sport keenly. "You be ther chap they call Rosebud Rob?"

"The same, old boy, and you, I believe, are the famous Indian-fighter, Old Avalanche?"

"Kerect—ther great double-distilled dynamite disaster o' ther plains—ther famous terrific extirpatin' zephyr o' ther north, by ther great ham-bone! I've heerd o' ye, too, an' et gives me pleasure ter grip yer paw. This hyar party is Calamity Jane, ter whom et does me proud ter make ye acquaint."

Rosebud Rob raised his hat gallantly in acknowledgment to Calamity's bow, and then turned to the Annihilator.

"So ye think the ruffian will get away with Blonde Bill, eh?" he asked, a faint smile playing about his handsome mouth.

"Dunno," the old man replied, watching the sea of people below. "Mebbe ther cinnamon-haired galoot is good for his oats, but I'd orfully like ter see them ar' green goggles knocked away from his eyes."

Calamity Jane started, and gazed at him sharply.

"What do you mean?" she demanded, in a lowered tone. "Can it be that you have been tackled with ther same desire I have, ter see ther eyes uv thet pilgrim down there?"

"I shed opine thet same. I say, Rosebud, who is Blonde Bill?"

The old man bent forward, and gazed as sharply into the Sport's face as Calamity had into his own.

Rosebud gave vent to a surprised little laugh.

"I see that all three of us have something of a curiosity, in the same direction," he said. "If you were to ask me who were the inhabitants of the moon, I could tell you just as easily."

"Ye don't know, then?"

"I do not, more than that he calls himself Blonde Bill, has a plenty of ready cash, and is a second cousin to an iceberg, so far as coolness goes."

They now ceased to converse, for the time being, in order to watch the approaching combat between the blonde man and the ruffian.

Salamander Sam had thrown off his coat, vest and shirt, and stood stripped to the waist. His form as thus revealed was sinewy and muscular.

Blonde Bill stood with arms folded across his breast, watching the unstripping of his adversary, with a strangely peculiar smile lurking beneath his blonde moustache. As yet he had made no preparations at all for the fight.

"Cum, ye cinnamon cuss," Beautiful Bill cried, as he noted his man standing so calm and unconcerned. "Ye wanter be pullin' off yer togs, ef ye expect ter lick ther black-haired galoot."

"I have no preparations to make,"

Blonde Bill replied, indifferently. "When the ruffian is ready, I am."

"D'ye mean ter call me a ruffian?" Salamander Sam demanded, savagely. "I'll pound ther daylights clean outen ye fer that."

"It is your privelege to do so, ef ye git ther chance," Blonde Bill replied, again, apparently not the least troubled by his opponent's threat. "When you are ready, sing out. How do you want it—by rule, or 'do as you please?'"

"Do as ye durn please, on course," Salamander Sam replied, an evil glare in his eyes, for right glad was he to have the chance of a choice. "Do as you please," or rough-and-tumble fighting, as sometimes practised in the mines, gives a person a chance to bite, kick, scratch, knock or gouge, without any conformity to the general rules of pugilism, and is certainly the most effective and brutal manner of using a man up, without mercy.

A growl of dissent ran through the crowd as the ruffian eagerly accepted the beastly mode of fighting, for he had a wide reputation of being the champion of that particular field, and very few were there among the assembled spectators, who would have liked to see the blonde stranger clawed to death by the wolfish ruffian.

But Blonde Bill did not appear to be particularly concerned, as he stood calmly awaiting his adversary's onslaught. Faster came the people, and denser grew the crowd in Silverton's little main street, but Beautiful Bill patrolled the outskirts of the ring with frowning mien, and kept back the spectators by having a huge pair of four-shooters in his grasp.

"Git back! git back!" he yelled, "ef ye doan't want to git snagged inter purgatory on er streak o' greased lightnin'. Ther sarcus is about ter begin—ther performers aire now on ther sawdust, and ther old Pet Elerfant aire a-waltzin' around ther trail. Keep back, ef ye doesn't want ter explode!"

Involuntarily the crowd surged back to a respectful distance, for they were rather chary of this big overgrown individual from Leadville, whose aspect was anything but saintly, to say the least.

The Coloradoan, Salamander Sam, now was ready, and moved stealthily toward the centre of the ring, his eyes expressive of a venomous purpose.

Blonde Bill also moved forward to meet him, with his arms still folded upon his breast, and a faint smile lurking about his lips.

When within a couple of yards of each other, both men paused—paused, and gazed at each other. The one evilly,

fiercely, malignantly; the other steadily—deadly.

The next instant the Coloradoan launched himself forward, directly at his antagonist, with doubled fists, and mouth open, as if he were bent upon the instant annihilation of his victim. Not an inch stirred the blonde man from his tracks, but suddenly stretching out his arm, he knocked the attacker back to the ground, without any apparent effort.

Down went Salamander Sam, like a log, and lay quivering where he had fallen, while a cheer of applause rose from the crowd, and the Pet Elephant of the Leadville Trail danced about in the hugest kind of delight.

"Kerwhoop!" he roared, springing high in the air. "Thet's ther way ter skin ther Devil."

"The blonde man's a clipper!" Calamity Jane said, enthusiastically, as with Rosebud Rob and Avalanche, she watched from the veranda. "I'll bet high on him, after seein' him plant that one blow. Ah! Salamander Sam is crawling to his feet, after another dose."

It was even so. The ruffian had regained his feet, and stood a few feet from Blonde Bill, his eyes glaring more like those of a wild beast, than those of a human being.

"Curse ye!" he hissed, fiercely, "what did ye hit me with?"

"Wi' his patent, cast-iron post-malls, on course!" Beautiful Bill replied, with a grin. "Oh! he's a hoss, is that blonde cuss, an' I ken't plant a better crop o' knuckles myself."

"Come, you overgrown booby, get to business, if you want another instalment," Blonde Bill commanded peremptorily. "I am anxious to get through with you, and go about my business."

This caused a titter among the spectators, and more enraged the ruffian.

"I'll finish ye, this time," he gritted, fiercely, and the next instant he took a flying leap forward, that brought him directly in front of the blonde man. In a moment more the two had clinched, tightly.

It was now to be a contest of strength, rather than science, and the attention of the spectators became greater.

The Coloradoan was a man of great muscular strength, and it would seem that he had a decided advantage over his opponent, but such was not the case, for, although he tried the squeezing hug upon the blonde man, with the hope of crushing him, he soon found that his adversary knew a trick or two about the little game himself.

Like the powerful jaws of a vice did the arms of Blonde Bill wind around the Coloradoan, and tighter and stronger be-

came his hug, until the eyes of the black-haired pilgrim began to bulge from their sockets, and he grew purple in the face.

Around and around staggered the locked enemies, both powerless to escape each other's hug, and each using his master efforts to crush the life out of the other.

It might seem a strange and horrible way of fighting, out in the far East, where such scenes are unknown; but in the wild life of the wilder mines of the far West, it is esteemed the acme of *sport*, and eagerly witnessed by even the "toned" citizens.

The blonde man was the coolest, and apparently least affected. If the savage hug of the Coloradoan hurt him, the fact was not perceptible upon his smiling face; while on the contrary Salamander Sam's face was purple, his eyes bulged nearly out, and his tongue was hanging from his mouth.

"When you get enough, let me know, and I'll unloosen," Blonde Bill said, as he noticed his adversary's condition.

"Never, curse ye!" was the gasping reply. "I'll die first!"

At this instant a change came. A pistol-shot was heard, and Blonde Bill suddenly dropped one arm to his side, with an exclamation, while Salamander also released his hold, and fell to the ground.

"I've been shot," Blonde Bill said, "and so has my opponent. Who committed this act? Show me the man, and with my uninjured right arm I will fight him!"

In an instant all was confusion, and hasty search and inquiries followed, but without satisfactory result.

No one seemed to know or have the least idea who had fired the shot which had barked the blonde man's wrist, and entered his opponent's back.

Whoever had fired the shot had been at some distance from the crowd, probably, as the report had not been heard.

The man, Salamander, bled like a stuck hog, and an examination proved that he could not be other than mortally wounded, for the bullet had entered his back and penetrated the left lung.

"Who wants ter take charge o' this chap?" Beautiful Bill demanded. "His fiddle is bu'sted, an' we sha'n't heer much more music from him. Who wants 'im, I say?"

"I'll take charge of him," a brawny, brown-whiskered miner replied, "and see that he has proper care."

And with the assistance of a couple of companions, he bore the wounded ruffian out of the ring and away.

The crowd now began to disperse, but were to some extent prevented from leaving,

as Honourable Ray Vernon, of Ohio, stepped forward and said :

"Excusing me, gents, for detaining you, it will be to your advantage to give me a moment's attention. I have discovered who it was that shot the blonde man and the ruffian."

"Oh! ye have, eh? Then y'u're ther precise chap we want ter see," Beautiful Bill declared.

"The man who fired the cowardly shot is present," the Congressman went on. "As I understand your laws of honour, here in the mines, gentlemen, the man who does a mean act in a sly or treacherous manner is considered dishonourable, and deserving of being lynched. Is this not correct?"

"Keerect!" cried the giant, with a flourish, and his sentiment was echoed by nods from the others.

"Then I propose you string up the man, Blonde Bill," the Ohioan decided; "for he is the guilty man who fired the shot!"

CHAPTER VII

A BAD LOOKOUT FOR BLONDE BILL

THE announcement of the Ohioan was received with a general murmur of surprise, and not a few of the spectators gave vent to dissenting murmurs, while the big man from Leadville jumped fully three feet from the ground, with a yell of derision.

"Git out hyar, ye durned galoot!" he ejaculated, ferociously prancing up to the Ohioan. "Ye don't wanter die a unnatural death, do ye? Waal, then, ye doan't want ter cast insinywations ag'in' my friend wi' ther yaller moustache. Beautiful Bill's my name, an' ef ye doan't wanter be measured fer yer pine-box, ye'd better dry up yer vocabulary."

"I care not who you are, sir; I have a right to make a truthful assertion," the Congressman declared, firmly. "If you will listen, I'll explain to you. I was watching the contest very closely, at the time of the shooting, and I saw a small pocket revolver slip down from the blonde man's coat-sleeve, in such a way that it came between his thumb and forefinger of his right hand, the muzzle being pointed at his antagonist's back over his (Blonde Bill's) left wrist. Before I could give the alarm, it was too late—the shot was fired, and with the dropping of the blonde man's arm to his side, the weapon disappeared."

The looks of surprise and doubt began to disappear from the faces of the crowd to be followed by expressions of interest and belief.

"This is a strange story you are telling, pard," a miner said, who chanced to be Silverton's deputy-sheriff, by name George Garwood. "We've all, as a people, tuk quite a notion to the blonde pilgrim, an' et's hard ter believe he's up to sech sly gum games as thet."

"On course et is!" decided the Leadville giant, in disgust. "Et's ther disgustin'est kind o' a polecat lie, and durn my mother-in-law's little yaller dorg, ef I ken't lick ther onery cross-eyed, ring-nosed galoot w'ot preferred ther charge——"

"I do not know that you will take my testimony alone, gentlemen," the Ohioan continued, "and perhaps, again, it isn't any of my business to take up sides against the blonde, but I like to see things half-way fair. Perhaps there is some one in the crowd who saw the same as I, quick as was the action."

"Yes, there is another, who witnessed the foul deed," a voice replied, and out from the crowd stepped Silverton's ministerial man, the Reverend Lester Van Syckel. "Though it is my creed to be merciful, I will at no time screen crime, and I frankly acknowledge that I saw the blonde stranger's murderous act!"

"Then, by heaven! it must be so, and the assassin shall not escape," Deputy Garwood cried, "It was a mean and unfair act, and if there are any here who want invitations to a lynch picnic let 'em speak up brisk!"

"Here! here!" came the answer, by a hundred voices. "We're with ye!"

"Contrary, no!" roared the giant. "Beautiful Bill am I; but may I be eternally kicked ter death wi' cross-eyed mules, or buzzed ter death wi' anti-dyspeptic wassups, ef I'll evyer take sides ag'in' ther innercent chap wi' ther yaller moustache."

"You needn't; we can get along without you," the deputy replied, with a chuckle, as he saw that nearly all the crowd were ready to back him. "Cum along, boys, and we'll halter the hoss."

And, headed by Honourable Ray Vernon, the Reverend Van Syckel and the deputy, the crowd surged eagerly toward the hotel, upon the veranda of which Blonde Bill stood, in company with Rosebud Rob, Calamity Jane and Old Avalanche.

He had crossed over the street and engaged in conversation with the Sport, immediately at the conclusion of the strange duel, before the Ohioan's charges. Therefore he had heard nothing of the charges made against him, being deeply engrossed in conversation with Rosebud, Calamity and the Annihilator, to whom he had been introduced—Rosebud having

introduced his friends—nothing until the deputy-sheriff's hand rested on his shoulder, and the officer's voice exclaimed:

"Pard, you're my prisoner!"

"Oh! I am, eh?" the blonde man replied, somewhat surprised by the announcement. "How do you make that out?"

"Well, sir, I am the deputy-sheriff of this 'ere town o' Silverton, an' I hev orders frum ther people ter arrest ye fer killin' ther Coloradoan, Salamander Sam!"

"What's this?—arrest me for killing the man? Why, my dear sir, you must be out of your head! We were fired at by some unknown party while struggling with each other, and I came near getting the same dose the ruffian got. I have a bark here on my left wrist as a memento of the close call!"

"Yas, that's all well enough for you to say, but et don't pass muster, ye see, wi' this hyar court," Garwood announced, determinedly. "We've got two men who tell a different sort o' a story from yourn. They say a revolver dropped out of your sleeve, into your hand, went off an' then disappeared from sight again, the result being the wound in the Coloradoan's back, an' a kiss o' yer wrist, purposely intended, no doubt. Now, mebbe this ain't so, but luks likely, an' so I arrest ye fer trial, wi' ther prospect o' a lynch picnic!"

"This is an infamous plot against me—a scurvy lie. I did not kill the ruffian, nor did I have any hand in it!" the Blonde replied, with sudden fierceness. "Who are my accusers?"

"I am, for one," the Buckeye Congressman said, stepping forward with a malignant smile of triumph upon his face. "I saw you do precisely as the deputy here, has described."

"And, I, too!" added the Reverend Van Syckel, with a sorrowful look. "Although I would be a shepherd to the Lord, and gather lambs unto my fold, I cannot allow myself to screen crime, and permit the wicked to go unpunished."

Blonde Bill was staggered when he saw the evidence offered, but he remained as calm as was his usual wont.

"Gentlemen, you are both infernal liars," he answered. "Your testimony is falsehood and slander—some scheme worthy of Satan's imps to harm me. Again I protest that I had nothing to do with the shooting."

"Sorry fer ye, pard, but yer word won't carry weight, I'm afeard," the deputy replied. "Two aces is allus better'n a lone jack, an' ye see how 'tis yerself."

"Thar's another way o' gettin' at the matter," a miner suggested. "Ef he did

the shootin', as stated, no doubt he still carries the weapon concealed in his coat-sleeve."

"Good idea!" the deputy accepted. "Pull off yer coat, prisoner!"

"Very well, I will do so," Blonde Bill said, obeying the order, "and you will find a small revolver suspended in the sleeve by a rubber elastic. It is loaded in every chamber, and you can easily see that it has not been fired, as I have had no occasion to use it."

A short search found the weapon, just as its owner had prophesied. It was a brand-new four-shooter, of small or vest-pocket pattern, and being bright and polished in every part, and fully loaded, had evidently never been used. A further search of the blonde man's person revealed no other weapons except those he carried exposed to view in his belt.

"Thar! now ye see, don't ye, thet ther Ohio polecat was a-lyin'?" triumphantly cried Beautiful Bill, as he crowded forward. "Et's conclusive proof that he's innercent."

"On course he is!" exclaimed Calamity Jane, joined by similar exclamations from Avalanche and Rosebud Rob. "The blonde cuss didn't shoot ther rough no more'n I did."

"Well, I ken't tell about thet," Garwood replied. "Things seem ter be a leetle mixed, an' et will be necessary to have a trial."

"See here!" Calamity cried, confronting the deputy; "jest you hold on a trifle. If I mistake not, ther fight was a 'do as ye please' affair—wasn't it?"

"On course it was. To that fact I do solemnly sw'ar an' asseverate—I, Beautiful Bill," roared the giant, with a flourish. "On course, them war ther constitoochin an' by-laws o' ther horse-der-combat, an' I kin lick ther ornery burro who sez ther blonde man shot ther Salamander, er sez he didn't hev er right to, ef he pleased! All in favour o' freein' ther yaller-hirsuted galoot will make manifest by saying I, with capital emphat!"

"I!" cried Calamity Jane.

"I!" cried Old Avalanche.

"I!" cried Rosebud Rob.

"An' I—I—I—yi—yi—I!" roared the big Leadvillite. "Blonde Bill forever!"

But they four were the only ones to affirm. The remainder of the excited crowd were grimly silent.

"The majority rules, gentlemen, and it is my duty to make the arrest," the deputy-sheriff persisted. "Will you come with me, prisoner, or shall I have to use force?"

"I will not resist the law, sir!" Blonde Bill replied, as he put on his coat. "Lead

ahead, and you have my word that I will follow."

"Your word is sufficient," the deputy replied, "Come along."

He turned, descended from the veranda, and up the street they went, the crowd parting on either side to give them passage. Close behind followed the Sport, Rosebud Rob, and also Beautiful Bill, Calamity, Avalanche, with the surging crowd bringing up the rear, the Buckeye Congressman and the Reverend Van Syckle among them.

At the upper end of Silverton's long main street stood a large barn, which was used partly for stabling horses during the winter season, but was now empty. It also served as courthouse and jail for the little town, when there was need for such a place, which was seldom.

To this castle of legal jurisdiction the deputy-sheriff led the way.

Every available space was soon occupied in this impromptu court-room, and Blonde Bill stood in the prisoner's box—an empty feed-box, while Garwood towered upon an imaginary judge's stand.

"Feller-pilgrims," he said, after glancing over the crowd, "we are here for the purpose of trying a man for murder in the first degree. Mebbe sum o' ye ain't heerd ther testimony, so the first party of the prosecution will please be heard."

Ohio's representative accordingly arose, and stated what he knew, precisely as he had first done, when making the accusation.

He was then followed by the ministerial man, who confirmed his statement, with a few concisely chosen words.

"You see, feller-citizens," Garwood said, "the proof is conclusive. The blonde chap undoubtedly did the shooting, and he therefore is pronounced guilty. There is no use of impaneling a jury—the case can be decided without. All ther is ter do is ter vote on et. All in favour o' seein' Blonde Bill hoisted, will confer a favour by saying ay!"

"Ay! ay! ay!" came a hoarse, tumultuous shout of many voices.

"Contrary, no!"

"No!" came the reply—but only a few voices heralded the cry.

"Et's decided, then," Garwood announced, "an' I, ther deputy-sheriff an' jedge o' this hyar town o' Silverton do sentence Blonde Bill to be hanged ter ther first convenient limb o' a tree, one hour hence. Clear ther court-room, an' allow ther prisoner a quiet chance ter cogitate over his prospects."

And, so out once more into the moonlight emerged those citizens of Silverton, and waited in groups in the immediate

neighbourhood, for no thought of sleep was there, with the prospect of the soul-inspiring spectacle of seeing a man launched into eternity.

In the hurry of the exit from the building, Calamity Jane had somehow got separated from Old Avalanche and Rosebud Rob, but evidently purposely, for no sooner had she gotten out of the thickest of the crowd, than she sped off up the mountain-gulch trail with rapid steps.

Once she was out of sight of human eyes, she increased her pace to a trot, finally to a run.

Through the gulch, with its grim bordering of tall spectral pines, she flew like a startled fawn, the occasional bars of mellow moonshine darting athwart her face, and revealing a wild, resolute expression.

Rude shanties and cabins were strewn along through the gulch, but she seemed scarcely to notice them, until she reached one, about a half a mile from Silverton, with a man sitting upon the threshold of the doorway, and evidently enjoying the beautiful moonlight, as he smoked a grimy clay pipe.

A red-shirted, roughly dressed fellow, with bushy bewhiskered face, and shrewd little eyes, and a form betokening muscle and sinew.

Before him the girl dare-devil came to a halt, her bosom heaving deeply, from her swift run.

"Raphael!" she said, questioningly.

"By heaven! is it you, Calamity?"

And the man sprang to his feet, glad surprise beaming from his little eyes.

"Yes, it's me," was the hasty reply. "I am glad you know me. You promised me, Raphael, when you served under Deadwood Dick's flag, that, did I ever need assistance, I might command you."

"In truth I did, Calamity. You were a faithful friend to our Captain, Deadwood Dick, in those bygone days, up in the Black Hills, and that fact made me a friend to you. The chance has never come as yet, when I could deal you an assisting hand."

"Well, it has come now. A man—an innocent man, mind you, is about to be hanged, down there"—with a nod toward Silverton—"and it must not be. What is to be done?"

"Rescue him, if you say so."

"But the crowd's against him—and us. There's a full hand of 'em."

"I care not. Count the cabins up the gulch—there's twelve of 'em, and every cabin contains three or four boys who know me as a leader. Once they knew Deadwood Dick in the same shape!"

"Can it be true? Then, if they'll

volunteer, we're flush yet. Get them together at once, and I'll lead you and them down through Silvertown, in the way Dick used to do up in the hills."

The miner, Raphael, nodded, and drawing a silver whistle from his pocket, he blew a shrill blast that echoed and re-echoed in wild, piercing, detonating quavers through the valley gulch.

CHAPTER VIII

JUDGE LYNCH DETHRONED

IN the meantime the crowd waited in the moonlit gulch, for the moment to arrive when Blonde Bill was to be a chief participant in a tight-rope performance. Eager were these Silvertownians to watch the lynching process, so that they could get the "hang" of it, as some facetiously inclined miner remarked.

At last the door of the barn swung open, and a wild yell arose, for it was known by that that the allotted time had expired.

The next instant the deputy-sheriff stepped out into the gulch, followed by four other men, between whom Blonde Bill marched as a prisoner.

As calm and composed as a statue was the man, not a trace of fear upon his face, nor a tremor to his form.

The nearest tree suitable for the purpose of Judge Lynch was one hundred yards up the gulch, and toward this the prisoner was led, followed by the crowd.

A stout lasso was made ready, as soon as a position was reached beneath a strong, outreaching branch, and while the noosed end was secured about Blonde Bill's neck, the other was tossed over the limb, and taken in charge by a half-dozen ready volunteers.

"Now, then, pardner, ye'r' all hunk!" the deputy-sheriff said, surveying the prisoner with a patronizing air. "All's required is a leetle muscle, to h'ist ye. So, before the ceremonies begin, w'ich'll be in five minutes, ef ye hev any confessions to make, or eny prayers ter offer, ye'd better git down to bizness, lively."

"I would like to speak a moment with Rosebud Rob, if you haven't any objections," Blonde Bill replied.

"Not in the least," Silvertown's worthy deputy replied, accommodately. "Rosebud Rob, if he is present, will please come forward."

The handsome Sport obeyed, as soon as he heard his name spoken. A moisture came into his eyes, as he beheld the blonde man, ready for a launch into eternity.

"By heaven, Bill, I would that it were in my power to help you!" he said, huskily, "but the four of us ain't enough."

"Of course not, and there's no other way out of the difficulty than by hanging, though the Lord knows I didn't shoot the ruffian. Rosebud, have you any idea who I am?"

"No!" the Sport replied—"except you are Blonde Bill."

"That is only a *nom de plume*," the other replied. "I've got to stretch hemp, and I may as well do it under my real as under a fictitious name. I am Richard Edward Harris—better known as *Deadwood Dick*!"

Rosebud Rob gave vent to a sudden exclamation, which was in turn echoed by the crowd.

"Deadwood Dick—you?"

"Yes, I! As Blonde Bill I was enabled to return here, whence these accursed Silvertownians drove me; therefore, the disguise," was the reply. "Where are Calamity and Avalanche?"

"I do not know. I have not seen them since we left the court-room."

"Well, it matters not. They would grieve to see me shuffle off, and it is better they should be spared the pain. You will do as well. I want you to promise me something."

"Anything, friend," the Sport said, gravely.

"Good. I know you're true as steel. You have heard of the mines, Deadwood Dick's Discovery. Henceforth and forever hereafter they are yours, and Calamity's jointly. But, in order to get them, you must get the deed of them from that Ohio scoundrel, and plant your flag on the claim. You are no outlaw; they will not dare to drive you off. Another thing: I want you to break up the outlaw gang that caused the death of my wife, Edith. You will not have a hard job. The leaders of that gang are, I truly believe, the same pair who caused my sentence to-night, and it was the minister's daughter who fired the shot that killed Salamander Sam."

"I'll carry out your wishes to the letter," the Sport replied. "Is that all?"

"Yes. Go, now, and let the law take the vengeance she has so long been deprived of."

With tears dimming his eyes, Rosebud Rob turned away, and retraced his steps to the place where he had left the giant.

Even as he did so, the voice of the deputy-sheriff was heard:

"Time's up. He' oh! he'!"

"Come!" Rosebud said, to the giant, "let's get out of this. I don't care to witness the spectacle."

Nor did Beautiful Bill, for, with a yell,

he turned and dashed down the street after the Sport. Ruffian though he was, by nature born, and rude and uncouth as the wild mountainous country of which he was a denizen, it was possible that he still had a heart more capable of tender emotions than his every-day exterior would seem to betray.

A wild, reverberating yell, as they rushed down toward the Leviathan, warned them that Deadwood Dick's feet had cleared the ground—that he was being launched into eternity.

But hark!

Not only do the yells of the crowd swell upon the night, but other yells rise far above them—fierce yells they are, accompanied by the sounds of rapid pistol-shots, and the thunder of horses' feet!

Then follow startled cries, and a perceptible breaking of the crowd; a mass of humanity comes rushing headlong down Silverton's main street, with howls and curses, as if the Old Nick in person were after them.

"What in the blazes is the matter?" Rosebud Rob gasped, as he and Beautiful Bill reached the veranda of the Leviathan, a few moments ahead of the crowd.

"Holy polecats! can't ye see?" the big man from Leadville cried, pointing up the street. "Road-agents! road-agents, sure's I'm ther Apoller o' ther West. Road-agents, by ther breath uv old Zachariaher Zebulom, an' they've reskied ther blonde cuss, too! Hip! hip! hurraher!" And loudly the giant's triumphant huzza rung out upon the night.

But, the rushing crowd paused not to learn from whence it came. Madly they sped on, frantic with desire to escape the band of masked horsemen that had driven them away from Judge Lynch's tree.

But, they need not have fled in such confusion for the outlaws halted at the tree, and proceeded to take the rope from the neck of Blonde Bill, who had been dropped to the ground at the fleeing of his executioners, unharmed.

But his bonds were not cut, except those around his feet, and they were renewed, when he was lifted into the saddle.

Seeing this act, one of the party uttered an exclamation of surprise, but a revolver pressed against his temple by an outlaw by his side, had the effect to produce silence.

Blonde Bill was securely fastened into the saddle of an extra horse that had been brought along; then the lead-line was taken in charge by one of the rescuers.

Then, the dismounted ones again leaped into their saddles, and the cavalcade dashed away over the back trail, with yells of victory.

On they went up the gulch, into the interior of the mountainous district—now branching off into cross ravines, gulches and canyons—on, on, the wild ride continued, until the light of another day flecked the crest of the horizon.

Then, to the great surprise of Blonde Bill they came to a halt upon a singular plateau in the side of the mountains due east from Silverton, and overlooking the San Juan valley, through which the turbulent Animas followed its tortuous course like a thread of silver.

Here a dismount was made by the outlaws; Blonde Bill was released from his saddle, and assisted to the ground.

His arms were kept bound, however, and he was carefully guarded by two of the masked strangers.

After all had dismounted, the course was taken up through a narrow fissure that seemed to split the mountain in twain, and one by one the masked men, their prisoners and horses, disappeared within this yawning gap, as if entering into the very bowels of the earth.

Into what strange hands he had fallen or whither he was going, Blonde Bill had not the slightest idea.

The rescue of Blonde Bill by the masked band, was an event that furnished much food for discussion among the residents and population of Silverton's little town.

And for the next several days it was widely discussed.

The general belief was that the strange band of rescuers were some of Deadwood Dick's own men, while there were a few who declared that he had been rescued by the terrible Silent Tongues. But those who did not believe the first inference were limited.

Even Rosebud Rob and Beautiful Bill were inclined to that opinion, although they had no proof of it, and were somewhat anxious.

Avalanche and Calamity, too, were both missing, which had a strange look.

On the evening of the day after that on which the rescue had taken place, the Reverend Lester Van Syckel left the hotel, and walked up the street to the first corner, where he turned off, and made his way into that scattered and mountainous part of the town, which had not as yet been classified into streets.

A short walk brought him to a large board shanty, somewhat isolated from other habitations, and apparently unoccupied, as there were no signs of life about it, and the windows were closely boarded up.

The night was extremely dark, owing to the fact that the sky was thickly covered with a pall of black clouds; yet the ministerial man appeared nervous lest he should be seen, and walked with careful precision.

On reaching the vicinity of the cabin or shanty, he paused, and gazed sharply around him, as if to assure himself that no one was watching him; then he clapped a mask over his face, and fastened it there, thus effectually disguising his identity.

He then advanced to the door of the shanty, and unlocked it. Opening the door, he entered a large apartment, which was wrapped in darkness, and closed it behind him.

Fumbling around, he soon found a lamp which he lit, and placed upon a mantle.

The apartment as revealed by the light, was furnished by a large round table in the centre of the room, surrounded by some two dozen chairs. Rude settees were also arranged around the sides and ends of the apartment, making a seating capacity for at least two-score of people.

Taking a seat by the table, the disguised minister lit a cigar, and waited.

He had not been seated ten minutes when the door opened, and another masked man entered from the darkness of the night without.

"Ah! it's you is it, Vernon?" the renegade minister said, with a nod. "I am glad you are punctual, for we have business to attend to, to-night."

"Exactly," the other said. "It was a bad thing for us that Blonde Bill, who turns out to be Deadwood Dick, has escaped."

"Bad enough," the minister said, in a tone that spoke of anything but a sanctified spirit. "Have you seen any of the other members?"

"Yes, there are several in town."

The assertion proved correct, for more masked men began to string along into the shanty, one by one, until, in the course of an hour, over a score were assembled.

As no more came, after that, the minister arose, and glanced the crowd over.

"My friends," he said, "I am glad to see so many of you present, because we have important business on hand, that concerns the future welfare of every member of the band of Silent Tongues. We have an enemy in this town, who is deadly against us, and his removal from our path is imperatively necessary. The man is—he who was rescued last night, Blonde Bill—*alias* Deadwood Dick, the ex-road-agent!"

A deep murmur came from the crowd, showing that they knew, but had no love for the Prince of the Trail.

"Some of you may have heard," pursued

Van Syckel, "that this same man came here for the sole purpose of breaking up our band, as he has successfully done in other parts of the country. It is true, else I would not have ordered an attack upon the stage, in the San Juan, which resulted so disastrously for our party. I had learned that the fellow was bound hither, and I thought that we could secure the treasure without loss of life, and at the same time settle his hash.

"But the bullet intended for him took off his wife," Hon. Ray Vernon said.

"Yes. I did not get a good chance at him."

"Deadwood Dick is safely caged at the headquarters, captain," one of the masked outlaws said, rising and bowing. "I just came from there."

"What! Deadwood Dick captured, and at the stronghold? How is this?—explain!" the renegade minister cried, excitedly.

"Et was ther Lieutenant Raphael who did it," the outlaw replied. "Yer see, Raphael, he used ter be one o' Deadwood Dick's fellers, an' Calamity Jane she knowed him. So when she heard thet Blonde Bill was a goin' ter be hanged in an hour, she off an' hunts up Raphael, an' asked him ter help her resky the chap frum bein' lynched, on account of old friendly scores. Raphael he knows his Q's and P's, an' so he jest gits sum o' ther boys together, an' sails in an' reskies ther blonde cuss, wi' Calamity Jane along, an' then totes both she an' ther blonde chap off ter headquarters, an' sends me ter let ye know!"

Van Syckel *alias* Captain Terrible, the leader of the dreaded Silent Tongues, gave vent to an exclamation of joy.

"Things have worked well," he said, rubbing his hands together, gleefully. "Deadwood Dick in our power, we can soon dispose of him, and thereby rid the brotherhood of a dangerous enemy."

"Certainly; and with his death, the Discovery mines down on the Los Animas become undisputably ours!" Ohio's professed Congressman said, with a triumphant chuckle. "You say the girl, Calamity Jane, is also a captive, Rulof?"

"Yes, Sir, Grand Chief."

"I will turn her over to you, my brother," Van Syckel said, addressing the Ohioan. "I want no women upon my plate. But come; we have been long enough in session. Take your departure as you came, singly and cautiously, for should suspicion be aroused as to our meetings here, inquiry would follow, and it would not be healthy for us hereabouts."

Accordingly the Silent Tongues disbanded in about the same order as they came.

CHAPTER IX

ROSEBUD ROB AS A DETECTIVE

ROSEBUD ROB, the Sport, was one of the masked men who assembled within the council-chamber of the Silent Tongues that night all by the merest chance.

He had been up to a gambling saloon, not far from the shanty, and was returning, when a masked man passed him, and entered the said shanty.

It at once struck him as a "little off," and being of an adventurous turn of mind, his curiosity was aroused; so he lingered in the vicinity to watch proceedings.

Not long did he have to wait ere another masked man came along, and followed the example of the other by entering the shanty.

Thoroughly aroused by this time, Rosebud Rob, with his accustomed quickness, resolved to enter the cabin also.

"Ef thar ain't a revelation awaiting me in there, it won't matter so much," he muttered, "as I am in want of something to pass away time. When another of them chaps comes along, perhaps I can induce him to lend me one of his masks, and trade places with me."

It was not long ere another of the outlaws came stalking through the darkness, to suddenly find himself confronted by the Sport, and a revolver pressed close against his cheek, in the most suggestive manner.

"Sh!" Rosebud hissed; "not a peep, if you don't want me to sp'ile your beauty. I'm a dangerous man to r'ile, so you'd better be submissive. I want to go in there to-night, and you must lend me your uniform," and he nodded towards the shanty.

The masked outlaw gave vent to a growl, but did not attempt to reach for a weapon; he evidently knew better than to thus sign his own death-warrant.

"You'd better not try venturing in there," he grunted, "ef ye don't want ter git yerself inter trouble."

"I'll take the chances," the Sport replied, as, while he kept the fellow covered by the revolver in his left hand, he used the right to relieve him of his belt weapons. "I never got in so tight a place yet that I couldn't get out. Now be so kind as to put your hands behind you, and keep them there while I secure them. Don't you try no gum games, neither, if you don't want me to bore for ile in your cheek, with a lead auger."

The man obeyed, with poor grace, and in two minutes Rosebud Rob had him safely handcuffed, with a pair of the law's patent bracelets, which he always carried with him.

He then tripped him to the ground, and

tied his feet with his pistol belt, so that he was utterly helpless.

"What the deuce are you going to do with me, anyhow?" the outlaw demanded, gruffly.

"Sh! not so loud, if you don't want me to shut off your throttle-valve. I am going to drag you out of hearing, somewhere, and let you lay, while I visit the shanty, yonder. But first, let me remove your mask, and take a peep at you. You may be some friend of mine, and I'd awfully hate to discommode a friend, you know."

And with a chuckle, the Sport knelt beside his captive, and tore off the cloth mask which screened the upper portion of his face from view.

He gave an ejaculation of surprise the next instant.

"Garwood, the deputy-sheriff, as I live!" he gasped.

"Yes, Garwood, the deputy-sheriff," the other growled, savagely. "Young feller, you're the only one in Silvertown that knows this, an' I want you to keep my secret for me. How much do you want?"

"Nothing!" Rosebud Rob said, quietly. "I am no tool or slave to be bought for gold. Nor am I a fool to lose a good advantage. If you don't want your neck put where you put Blonde Bill's last night, you'll have to figure for me."

"I am at your mercy," the man replied. "It would not be healthy around here, if it was known what I am. Of course, I don't want to lose my position, and need not, if you're a mind to play fair. Ef ye want any jobs done, that ye don't want to do yourself, all ye've got ter do is keep my secret, an' depend on me."

Rosebud Rob involuntarily shuddered.

The man before him, a servant of the public and treasurer of their confidence, was in fact a villain, who, to screen one bad step, would do a darker deed.

"I shall promise you nothing," he said, sternly. "I'll leave you where you'll be safe, while I take a peep into yonder shanty. When I come back, mebbe I'll render a verdict!"

Without much difficulty he gagged the renegade officer, and then carried and dragged him into a little clump of pines, which grew in a wild spot, not far from the edge of the town.

Here he left him, and donning his mask, returned to the vicinity of the shanty. Watching his chance, he entered, and although great was the risk, he was not particularly noticed, and thus escaped detection.

What he heard, is already known to the reader. After the session closed, he left as soon as possible, and returned to where he had left the deputy-sheriff.

"Well, what are you going to do with me?" that guilty individual demanded, with an eagerness born, apparently, of greatest fear. "Ye ain't a-goin' ter give me away, I hope."

"That depends, somewhat," the Sport replied. "If ye tell me where the headquarters of the Silent Tongue outlaws is, I shall probably be more merciful, than if you refuse to grant the information."

"Then ye needn't be merciful," Garwood said, with a scowl, "fer I can't tell ye that. Ye kin string me up, but I cannot—will not tell ye that."

"Then, I'll liberate you," Rosebud said, cutting the bonds about his feet, and relieving him of the handcuffs. "You dare not do me harm, if you value your public office, and if I conclude to use you, I'll hunt you up, some other time. Go!"

"I will go," Garwood replied, "and I am no dog not to remember you. When I have had my revenge, we'll cry quits, if you're willing. Ha! ha!"

And the deputy took advantage of his liberty to stride away into the darkness.

"I'm 'most sorry I let the devil go," the Sport muttered, as he turned away towards the main street of the town. "He has not a spark of honour about him and will probably lay for me. But I am not afraid of him, if he don't take me at a big disadvantage, where I can't get a chance to use my arms."

He went back to the hotel and retired for the night.

Early in the morning he was abroad, and met Beautiful Bill upon the veranda.

"Waal, w'at's ther tap?" the giant demanded. "Heerd anything frum Deadwood Dick and Calamity?"

"Yes," and the Sport related his adventures of the previous night.

The big Leadvillite whistled, as he heard.

"Beats a red-hot novel all holler, by gum," he said. "So they're in the power o' ther Silent Tongues, arter all?"

"Yes, and it must be our business to get them out," Rosebud Rob said. "But *how*, is the question. I do not know where the outlaws' rendezvous is located."

"Ner I, by ther holy polecats. But yonder cums ther other branch o' ther great Continental De'th Committee, an' mebbe he kin dig up ther trail. I do sw'ar an' asseverate thet Old Avalanche, ther Annihilator, kin root up ary trail thet ever mortal made."

And, as the giant ceased speaking he slapped his hand heavily down upon the shoulder of the great scout, who had just come up.

"Take keer, Billee; not too heavy," the old veteran grunted. "My old j'int's won't

stand as much jarrin' as theyuster did, in ther days when ther Annihilation established ets great fame—great anti-carniverous ham-bone, no!"

"On course they won't, Alva, on course they won't; an' thet's ther reason I teched ye so lightly," the giant replied, effusively. "But we're glad ye've cum, all ther same, fer we hev need o' ye, ye pursevee."

"Yes, we have that," Rosebud Rob coincided. "We want ye to hunt up the trail of the Silent Tongues, and find where their headquarters are."

"Reckon thet wouldn't be no slouch of a job," the veteran Annihilator replied. "They hang out somewhere's about Clumsy mountain, over yonder to'rd ther Animas, 'ca'se I've seen sum o' their anymiles grazin' in the neighbourhood."

"You know that Blonde Bill—*alias* Deadwood Dick—and Calamity Jane are in the power of these Silent Tongues?"

"Great antiquated ham-bone, no!"

"Well, they are, we have learned, and if we don't get 'em out, it looks purty likely thet they'll be made the principal cadavers of a couple of funerals."

And then the Sport narrated to the old Annihilator what he had previously told Beautiful Bill.

When he had finished, a new fire of life and spirit came into the eye of the scout.

"Great ham-bone thet gargled the throat of old Joner!" he ejaculated. "Et is as you say: ther b'ye an' ther gal must be got out o' ther deefikilty, somehow. When d'ye want ter move?"

"Not just yet. I've got a little other bull-dozing to do before I go. If you see anything of Van Syckel, the preacher, or the Ohioan, look out for 'em, for I half expect they're at the head of the band of outlaws."

Taking leave of them, Rosebud Rob re-entered the hotel, and positioned himself in a place where he could see everybody that entered or left the place by the front entrance.

During the forenoon he noticed the man from Ohio leave the hotel, and shortly afterward the renegade preacher followed suit.

This was exactly what he was waiting for, and leaving his watching place, he ascended to the second floor of the building. Having previously obtained the numbers of Van Syckel's apartments, he had no difficulty in finding them now, and he tried the first door of the suite which opened, and admitted him into a plainly furnished sitting-room, lighted by two windows.

Nora Van Syckel, the bogus clergyman's daughter, was seated by one of these windows, engaged in sewing, at the moment of the Sport's abrupt entrance, but sprang to

her feet with a little cry of alarm, as she saw him.

"Sir!" she said, coldly. "To what am I indebted for this visit?"

"Excuse me, miss, but you are not indebted at all," Rosebud replied. "I never charge for professional visits, especially to ladies. I came to have a few words with you, and I trust taking the welfare of the Reverend Lester Van Syckel into consideration, you will have due patience and becoming fortitude, upon this occasion."

There was sarcasm in the Sport's tones that caused Miss Van Syckel to crimson, and then grow pale.

"I don't understand what you mean," she said, with an effort to conceal, somewhat, the agitation she felt, "but I will listen to what you have to say. Be seated, please."

"On the contrary, I think you do quite understand the import of my words," Rosebud Rob rejoined, accepting a chair, and becoming seated. "In the vernacular of the mines, I've come for the express purpose of 'talking turkey' to you. In the first place, I'd like to give you a question to answer. Whom did you intend that bullet for?—the ruffian, or Blonde Bill?"

The minister's daughter grew deadly pale at the question, but by a strenuous effort she managed to keep her composure.

"I—I don't understand you yet," she faltered. "What bullet do you mean?"

"The one that shut off the wind of Salamander Sam, in the street fight, night before last," was the reply. "You needn't deny that you fired it, for such a denial would not avail you. You were seen to stand upon the balcony, or roof over the veranda, and do the shooting, and now the question is, which did you shoot at?"

"That is none of your business," was the reply. "If you think you can make me commit myself, sir, you are mistaken."

"No, I am not mistaken!" Rosebud persisted. "You can either answer my questions, or I'll put you where Blonde Bill left off."

"Bah! you wouldn't dare!"

"Why not, pray?"

"Oh! for different reasons!"

The young lady was beginning to manifest more assurance.

"Because your reverend sire chances to be the Captain Terrible of the band of the Silent Tongues, eh?" was the retort. "I assure you that would not hinder my purpose."

Miss Van Syckel paled again.

"Who are you," she gasped, "that you know so much?"

"Rosebud Rob, at your service, miss—

a man to suit all circumstances," was the answer.

Then there was a silence of several minutes, which was finally broken by the young woman.

"You seem to be positive that I fired the shot," she said, "and I do not know as there is any use of beating around the bush; nor am I afraid to name who the bullet was intended for. It hit the party at whom it was aimed in the back."

"Ah! then it was not for Blonde Bill?"

"It was not."

"Well, that's one point in your favour. Why, may I ask, did you shoot the rough?"

"Because I had taken a fancy to the blonde gentleman, and thought the ruffian was going to be too much for him."

"You needn't have feared that," Rosebud commented, with a low laugh. "I opine it takes a *man* to hug Deadwood Dick to death."

"What! was Blonde Bill the famous Deadwood Dick?"

"He was."

"Well, that is news to me."

"Perhaps. But if you admired Blonde Bill, as you claim, why did you allow him to be arrested for your crime?"

"I will tell you," the girl answered, frankly. "My father saw me do the shooting, and came up here and locked me up in my room; then went back and plotted with Vernon for Blonde Bill's death. I was powerless to be of any assistance."

CHAPTER X

IN THE SILENT TONGUES' "POCKET" ROSEBUD ROB TAKES A JOB

LET us return to Deadwood Dick, otherwise Blonde Bill, whom we left in the power of the strange masked rescuers, who were, of course, the gang of cut-throats, that for several months had spread a reign of terror throughout the Animas, by their bold deeds.

After entering the fissure with which the mountain seemed rent, they proceeded along through a passage of utter darkness that was so narrow and low as to scarcely admit of their progress. For several minutes they continued through this, finally emerging into what proved to be a second plateau or spot of level land, which was totally locked in by perpendicular mountains that rose on every side to a height of a hundred and fifty feet, or more. This apparently was the Silent Tongues' retreat, for evidences of a permanent camp were plentifully strewn about. About every dozen yards around the edges of the "pocket," stakes and poles

were erected for holding kettles over a fire, and close to these larger niches or caves had been blasted out of the mountain rock, which provided sufficient shelter and living room for a couple of men and horses. In all, there were some thirty of these fire-places and caves.

As soon as the band debouched into the valley they separated, and made for their respective quarters, with the exception of the leader and two others, one of each of whom kept guard over Blonde Bill, and the masked person who had demurred at the arrest of the blonde man.

As the reader has probably surmised, this was Calamity Jane in disguise.

At a motion of Raphael, the lieutenant under Captain Terrible's command directed the prisoners to be removed to one of the caves, and closely guarded, until he gave further orders.

The mask was accordingly removed from Calamity's face, and her arms were bound behind her.

Then she and Blonde Bill were both conducted to an untenanted cave, and left to make the best of their situation, a guard being stationed at the entrance to prevent them from escaping.

When they were alone in each other's presence Blonde Bill turned to the girl daredevil, in surprise.

"Calamity," he said, "I am somewhat puzzled. Can you solve what is bothering me? Here I am snatched from the gallows, as I first supposed by friends, but later I find out enemies. And yet, I find you also among them—a prisoner!"

"Ha! ha! Yes. I am among them, a prisoner," Calamity replied. "I got fooled, ye see, an' thet 'counts fer it. D'ye know who thet gang o' fellers is?"

"The Silent Tongues, I have surmised, since seeing you a prisoner."

"Good guess. You hit it correct. D'ye want me to tell you how I came to be a prisoner?"

"Yes. Tell me, if you like."

Accordingly the girl narrated how she had, on learning of the disposition to be made of Blonde Bill, fled to seek aid from Raphael, one of Deadwood Dick's old men; how Raphael had consented to render assistance, and how, when the rescue had been effected, Raphael had pronounced her his prisoner, and threatened her with instant death if she offered resistance.

"So, you see how it comes, I'm here," she said, in conclusion. "I got fooled in my man, and now all I ask is to get just one pop at him with my pistol."

"We're in a fix, Calamity," said Deadwood Dick, "and we must get out of it."

I've dodged death so many times, that I don't intend to give up the ghost yet."

The guard stood in the entrance, in an attitude of listening; so they retired to a farther corner of the cave, and sat down beside each other.

"Yes, we must get out," the girl declared; "but I'm afraid we won't be successful in doing it. This remarkable retreat is well guarded, no doubt, and it would take some figgerin' ter dodge 'em."

The day passed away slowly.

At noon the guard before the entrance of the cave was relieved by another masked outlaw, but try though they would, the prisoners could not get a word out of either of them. Their title of Silent Tongues was well bestowed.

Shortly after noontide, another outlaw entered the cave, and to the surprise of both Dick and Calamity, cut their bonds from their hands and feet.

Then he left the cave, and speaking a few words to the guard, both went off together.

"There, now! will you tell me what that means?" Calamity demanded, when they had gone. "It looks as if somebody had changed his mind mighty sudden."

"It means that we are to have the freedom of the valley, I presume. At least, we'll take it, until otherwise warned," Dick replied.

He tore away the green goggles from his eyes and also removed the blonde wig and moustache, and stood there before her, handsome and fearless—Deadwood Dick.

"You see it's I?" he said, smiling.

"Yes, it is you, minus your raven curls and moustache—the same Dick whom I knew up in the hills."

They shook hands warmly and then took a peep out into the mountain-locked valley.

The light and sunshine of day shone down into it pleasantly from overhead, and made it seem more like the outer world.

Standing near the mouth of their cave, the two captives surveyed the scene with a sharp gaze. Few of the outlaws were abroad—a half-dozen, all told, being engaged in sifting sand, which formed the bottom of the pocket at the farther side.

These fellows and their occupation attracted the attention of Deadwood Dick, and he watched them narrowly.

"I believe they're mining gold over there, Calamity," he said; "and if such is the case, this is a good find. The outlaws have no right to it, and it is mine and yours. Do you hear? We must possess this cosy retreat ourselves."

We will go back to Rosebud Rob, and the minister's daughter.

The Sport was silent for some time following Miss Van Syckel's last words, as if weighing them in his mind.

"Then you are not in league with your father in his villainy?" he asked.

"I am not," she replied. "In fact I have not had the least suspicion but that he was doing right, until the attack of the Silent Tongues upon the stage in San Juan canyon. Then I heard him give vent to the whistle that was instrumental in causing the retreat of the outlaws, and knew for the first time that he was in some way connected with them. I questioned him, on reaching our home, here, but he professed to be awfully religious, and horror-struck at the suspicions I entertained of him. Later, however, I played eavesdropper, when he was holding a private confab with the man from Ohio, who is in reality my father's own brother, and learned that Vernon is the Grand Chief and my father the Captain of the Silent Tongues."

"Ah! I thank you, miss, for your frankness, in telling me all of this, as it puts me in a condition to fight these outlaw devils, and rescue Deadwood Dick, and Calamity Jane. The party of masked men who rescued Blonde Bill from being lynched, turned out to have been some of these self-same Silent Tongues, under one Raphael."

"Indeed? I am sorry for them, as they will probably be shown no mercy at the hands of the outlaws."

"But I intend to go to their rescue, and I want you to furnish me the information how to reach the headquarters of the band."

"I am sorry, but I cannot do that."

"Why not?"

"Because, it would not only betray my father to death, but bring down the vengeance of the other outlaws upon me."

"Fear not. No harm shall come to you. Guide me and my party to the den of these outlaws and I'll guarantee that no harm shall come to you."

Miss Van Syckel arose from her chair, and paced across the room and back, her face the scene of many struggling emotions.

"I'll tell you what I'll do," she said, finally. "I'll dress up in men's clothes, and guide you to the entrance to the Silent Tongue's retreat, for one hundred dollars, and the promise that I shall have my liberty to go where I please, when I have done as I have agreed. The cash you must pay now, for, as soon as I have done with you, I shall immediately fly to another part of the country, in order to escape being killed."

"It's a bargain," Rosebud accepted, quickly. "Here are a hundred dollars.

Mind you, now you're in my service exclusively, and *not* in the employ of Captain Terrible."

"I'll not forget it. When will you want me?"

"To-night, just at dusk. That will be the best time to make a start."

"Very well; I will be ready," the minister's daughter said, after which Rosebud arose, and took his departure.

As he descended the stairs to the veranda, he met the deputy-sheriff, Garwood.

He flushed a little, as he caught the Sport's stern gaze, but raised his hand and motioned for him to stop, which Rosebud accordingly did.

"Beg your pardon, sir," the deputy said, "but I was directed to hand you a little paper—a challenge, by the way, from the Honourable Ray Vernon."

And as he concluded, he extended an envelope, which the Sport received with a smile of thanks.

"An answer is wanted, I presume," he said, as he tore it open.

"A verbal one is all is necessary, I guess, sir," was the reply.

The challenge was written upon a single sheet of paper, and ran as follows:

"MR. ROSEBUD ROB, SIR:—

"As you have on several occasions insulted me, publicly, and as I am a man of high rank and social standing, it becomes me to challenge you to meet me, in mortal combat, at any time or place which may best suit you, the weapons to be revolvers at thirty paces each way from the centre. I would respectfully suggest that you would name an early moment for our meeting.

"HON. RAY VERNON."

Rosebud Rob read the challenge, a smile breaking over his countenance.

"Well! well!" he said, "I don't know that I have any objections to giving him a whirl, and so you may tell him that I will meet him in the Red Wine Saloon, just above here, one hour hence, and we'll plug away at each other. But, mind you, see to it yourself that no gum games are tried on me, or Silverton will need a new deputy-sheriff."

Rosebud Rob then hunted up Beautiful Bill and Old Avalanche, and found them in a saloon, engaged in a quiet game of old sledge, which the giant won.

When the Sport made known to them the challenge he had received and accepted, Beautiful Bill gave a snort of delight.

"I intend to teach the dog a lesson," Rosebud said, "and I want you two to be

present, and see that there is no unfair deal."

"On course we will—great ham-bone, yes! An' mebbe ther Death Committee will get er chance ter work a consarned old disease o' annihilation," the Annihilator suggested.

Accordingly they all left the saloon and started for the Red Wine, which resort was famous in the history of Silverton as the scene of many a bold duel and free fight.

As they entered the great apartment of the building, which was used for bar-room, gambling and fighting, they saw that Vernon was not there.

But he entered shortly afterward, accompanied by the deputy-sheriff and a couple of rough-looking, bewhiskered miners.

CHAPTER XI

ROSEBUD ROB MAKES HIS MARK

THE condition of his eyes was plain evidence that he had been drinking deeply, as was the unsteadiness of his gait; but he had apparently not as yet fully satisfied his appetite, for he immediately stepped up to the bar and called for the drinks for his party, which were promptly produced, paid for, and quaffed.

The Ohioan then turned away from the bar, and crossed with unsteady steps to where Rosebud Rob stood leaning against a tier of liquor barrels that were ranged along the side of the room opposite from the bar.

"Hello! it's you, is it?" he demanded, in a thick tone. "You're the man that wants to fight me?"

"I am undoubtedly the same party," was the Sport's response. "I believe I received a challenge from you, to meet you at this place?"

"Yes, curse you! You are a little too important to suit my style, and so I thought I'd comb you down a little, just for the fun of it. Are you ready, you puppy?"

"I am at your demand, but, as a friend, I'd advise you to wait until some other time, when your nerves are more quiet, and you are sober. You are drunk now, and in no condition for fighting a duel."

"You lie!" the other shouted, and the next instant he raised his hand, and made a pass at Rosebud's face.

The agile Sport parried the blow with his left arm, while with his right fist he dealt the villain a blow between the eyes that felled him to the floor.

"There! pick up your rooster and sponge him off, if he's going to do any business with

me," Rob said, turning to the deputy-sheriff. "The next time he tries to slap me in the face, I'll knock him clear out of time."

And there was no mistaking the flash that came from his eyes. It meant business.

A crowd quickly gathered.

Such a knock down invariably was the advance of a fight.

Garwood and his two companions hastened to assist their man to his feet, for he had only been stunned by the sledge-hammer blow.

They bathed his forehead, and regaled him with a brandy, "smash." Vernon then turned and glared at Rosebud Rob, savagely, while Garwood cried:

"Now, gentlemen, please git to either side o' the room, an' let the duellists have the ends."

Both men now took their relative positions—the Sport with his back against the door opening into the street, and the Ohioan with his back against the rear wall of the cabin.

The spectators were ranged upon either side, leaving an alley for the duellists.

"Now, gentlemen, let's know the terms of this engagement!" Garwood cried, "and we'll try and keep order."

"We won't only try, but we'll do that leetle same!" Beautiful Bill declared. "Ary ill-timed galoot that shows endica-shuns of treachery, will I spot right squar' atween ther eyes wi' one o' my patent love-pellets."

"The terms of the duel are that we fight with pistols, an' don't quit till one or t'other of us yells for quits!" Rosebud Rob announced.

"I beg to amend that resolution," Vernon growled. "We'll shoot till one or the other of us is dead!"

"Just as you like," Rosebud assented. "I was inclined to be merciful, but if you object, I have no reason to complain."

"Then git ready, for the Lordy's sake!" cried Beautiful Bill.

The two men drew their weapons, and stepped forward, a pace from the wall.

The Sport grasped a pair of heavy Colt revolvers, the Ohioan had a pair, if anything larger and more formidable than his opponent's. Up came the right hands of the two duellists, and as they rose to a level, Beautiful Bill, with a quick eye to business, shouted:

"One! two! three! Ther rooster crows an' away she goes!"

Then the report of the two weapons echoed through the room, with roaring effect, and there was a faint groan of pain, coming from the Ohioan. The Sport's bullet had torn a

passage through the fleshy portion of his left cheek, making an ugly-looking wound which bled profusely.

"Time!" Garwood ordered.

"Yas! giv 'im time ter rub down his charger, an' sponge off his cheek," snorted the big Leadvillite, capering about in the most undignified manner.

Time was accordingly given to bathe the wound of the Ohioan, and bandage it, he meanwhile cursing like a pirate.

"Such treatment is only fit for a dog," he growled. "The next time I'll kill the villain, outright."

"Yas, ye will!" roared the Leadville giant. "The next time, my pard, the Sport, 'll knock you 'way out o' time, mebbe, an' put another wrinkle in yer cheek."

This elicited a laugh from the spectators, and also increased the rage of the Ohioan; but he wisely repressed it.

He now took his place again, and the revolvers once more came to a level; there was a flash and a report, as Beautiful Bill gave the signal to fire.

The result was that the Ohioan gave vent to another howl of pain and rage.

The second bullet of the Sport had ploughed another furrow, this time through his right cheek!

Neither of the Ohioan's bullets had done the Sport any damage, and he stood at his end of the beat as cool and calm, literally, as an iceberg, while the Honourable Ray Vernon hopped around in a high state of pain and rage.

"Time, curse you!" he gasped. "Garwood, you fool, tie up this side. I'll murder that devil if I die a-doing it."

For the second time the Ohioan suffered the pain of having his wound dressed and bandaged; then he once more took his position, trembling with rage when he realized that his beauty was in all probability spoiled by the bullets of the Sport.

"Do you still want more?" Rosebud Rob demanded. "I could have killed you either shot, had I chosen. I'd advise you to throw up, for your own sake, as none of your bullets come anywhere near me, and if you continue, you'll only get the worst of it."

"That's none of your business as long as I choose to stand the blunt!" was the fierce answer. "Ready!"

Once more the weapons came to a level, and Beautiful Bill gave the word.

Once more there were two flashes—two reports—a howl of pain.

The Ohioan's pistol hand hung helpless and and bleeding by his side, the wrist shattered by one of the large bullets from the Sport's revolver. A faint streak of blood oozing out in the neighbourhood of the Sport's ear, told

where his opponent's bullet had left a trifling "kiss."

"Again doth the busy little bee improve each shinin' minute!" ejaculated Beautiful Bill. "How are ye, Ohio? Want sum more uv ther same piece o' goods?"

"I have got enough," the Ohioan replied, savagely—"at least, until I get able to use my hand. As for you, my man," turning to Rosebud—"as for you, I'll fix you yet. You have not heard the last of me, by any means!"

Then, turning, he staggered from the room followed by Garwood and the two miners, who had entered with him.

Rosebud gazed after them, a smile hovering about his lips, as he lit a fresh cigar.

"Gentlemen," he said, sarcastically, "I have the honour of introducing you to four members of the outlaw gang, known as the Silent Tongues. Yonder they go, headed by the right Honourable Ray Vernon, of Ohio."

A cry of surprise came from the crowd.

"You don't mean to say ther deputy-sheriff, too?" a miner cried.

"I do, precisely," Rosebud replied. "I happened to spy around and get into the meeting-house of these Silent Tongues last night, and learned so much that his honour from Ohio challenged me to fight, naturally expecting, no doubt to get the best of me."

"Then you charge these men with being members of the outlaw gang, eh?" another bystander demanded, pulling out his revolvers.

"I do," the Sport replied—"at least, the deputy-sheriff and the Ohioan, and it is not improbable that ef you would take off the false beards of one of those miners, you'd find his nibs, the Reverend Lester Van Syckel, who is the real Captain Terrible."

This was enough, for with a shout of vengeance a number of the crowd sprung in pursuit of the outlaws, who had left the saloon while the Sport was speaking.

But the pursuers arrived in the outer world just in time to gaze with chagrin upon four horsemen that were flying down the gulch at a safe distance, out of rifle-range, and bound mountainward.

Rosebud Rob turned to Avalanche and Beautiful Bill, with a shake of his head.

"I'm afraid that they'll get to the stronghold ahead of us. If Miss Van Syckel is ready, we will start at once."

He left them and betook himself hastily to the Leviathan Hotel, where he was so fortunate as to meet the pseudo-minister's daughter, in the main hall.

On explaining matters, she signified her willingness to get ready at once.

She then ascended to prepare, while Rosebud hunted up horses for the party.

They were presently joined by Miss Van Syckel, who was disguised as a young miner, in an admirable manner.

A mount was at once made, and the party set off in a direction opposite to that taken by Vernon, at Miss Van Syckel's advice.

"There are two routes to the rendezvous, or rather, to the neighbourhood of it," she explained as they rode along; "and I will take you over the least dangerous, for I have heard father describe both roads."

"Do you apprehend danger, then?" Rosebud Rob demanded.

"Yes. The Silent Tongues may have a suspicion of an attempt to rescue Deadwood Dick, and will guard against it."

CHAPTER XII

RAPHAEL'S PLOT

THE day passed quietly at the stronghold of the Silent Tongues, and night at last fell upon the earth with its sombre shadows. Neither Deadwood Dick nor Calamity ventured far out into the valley, but kept closely in the neighbourhood of their cave.

Once Dick went as far as the passage that was the entrance and exit of the "pocket," but found it guarded by two masked and well-armed outlaws.

He saw that escape here was out of the question, unarmed as he was, and accordingly sauntered back to the cave.

As the darkness closed in, their former guard entered the cave, bearing a lighted lantern, and a tray of steaming roast venison, pot of coffee, and some cold biscuits, which he deposited, and withdrew, without speaking.

Early on the following morning, the man Raphael made his appearance at the cave, unmasked.

Dick and Calamity were seated at the rude table, with which their abode was furnished, engaged in finishing the remnants of the last night's meal, when he entered, and bowed pleasantly.

"Pray excuse my intrusion," he said, politely. "I thought I'd look in upon you, having a bit of news to communicate. I suppose you know me, Deadwood Dick?"

"I do," Dick replied, as courteously as though he had been addressing a friend, instead of an enemy. "Calamity informed me whom I was indebted to for my rescue from Judge Lynch, and my subsequent captivity here."

"You are not having a very serious time here, I should judge," Raphael replied, with a smile. "Indeed, I did not intend that you should have, after I deliberated on the fact

that we were once master and man. I've a little plan to unfold, however, if you will give me your attention, which I think we can manage to our mutual satisfaction."

"My ears are open. Go ahead, and your words will receive due weight from me," Deadwood Dick said, in return, and Calamity echoed his words by a nod.

"Well, to begin with, you may not have heard that this hidden pocket is in truth a valuable gold-mine?"

"No, I never heard so, but have suspected as much since coming here."

"Then you have suspected rightly, for it is a richer gold-field than has ever yet been discovered in this part of the State. This is unknown to any persons, with your exceptions, outside of the band."

"Well?"

"Well, there are certain members of the band who have become tired of this general outlawry, and want to dissolve with the others. But, at the same time, they are not willing to bid farewell to the gold-mine, and therefore, there the matter stands."

"Why do those fellows wish to draw off?" Dick demanded.

"They are boys whom some misstep in life has forced to take up the life of road-agents, but who are not criminals at heart, nor by desire. That's why they wish to draw off from the others, whose ruffianly cravings are only for murder and plunder."

"How do the respective numbers stand?"

"There is a large majority of those who wish to disband, and they are the best men. The gang was considerably larger, until the fight in San Juan canyon, when quite a number were killed."

"But why are you telling me of all this about the outlaws? What does it interest me?" said Deadwood Dick.

"We want you to lead us, and we will put out the roughest of the gang, and keep the valley for ourselves. There is enough for us all, and we can hold the valley like a charm."

And the lieutenant laughed at his own proposition.

"But, supposing I were inclined to accept your proposition—what assurance have I that I would have my liberty, afterward?"

"The assurance, sir, that I was formerly one of your followers, and in making you our leader, will be yours to command, again, as will be the others."

"Very well; I will accept the position of command, with the understanding that we are miners, and citizens, and not outlaws. I will demand the right to keep Calamity Jane here, if so be she chooses to stay, and also three other friends to whom I am deeply indebted."

"Very well; I have consulted with our boys, already, and they are willing to go under your leadership, and give you full power to do for the mutual benefit of the company."

"How will you manage to get rid of the other portion?"

"Easy enough. They are now all sleeping off the effects of a drug that was administered to them in their tea, last night. They cannot recover consciousness before noon, and by that time we can have them all lugged out of the valley, at a safe distance from it. There they will be left to recover. When they recover, each will find pinned to his coat a paper, warning him that Deadwood Dick has taken possession and charge of the valley, with a large force of men, and any attempt on the excluded outlaws' part to enter the valley, will be punished by instant death. How like you the plan, Captain Harris?"

"Good. Unless the excluded outlaws haunt the vicinity of the exit of the valley, and make us trouble when we go in and out for provisions."

"I don't think they will, as there has already been talk among them of going down into New Mexico, and joining the La Muerte brothers' band."

"Well, go ahead, and follow your course of action, according to your plan, and we'll see how things will work!" Deadwood Dick commanded.

The lieutenant bowed, and at once took his departure.

An hour later the work of removing the bodies of the drugged outlaws from the valley was commenced, and by noon not a trace of them was left to tell the tale of the former existence of the Silent Tongues.

In the meantime Deadwood Dick and Calamity sauntered from one cave to another, and made an inspection of the quarters, after which they returned to their own cave.

Shortly afterward, Lieutenant Raphael marshalled his men before the entrance, and Dick was called forth to review them, which he did, and made a brief but appropriate address, which was received with enthusiastic applause. Then Raphael proposed three cheers for the new commander, which were given, and the band separated.

A strong guard had been stationed at both ends of the remarkable passage which furnished the mode of entrance and exit of the secret gold-pocket, and thus everything was satisfactorily arranged, without bloodshed or battle.

During the early afternoon, as Raphael and Deadwood Dick stood in the valley, engaged in conversation, a guard approached

them and tipped his hat in a respectful manner.

"If you please, captain, there's one o' the old gang outside the pocket, who has important orders, he says, from Captain Terrible, for the Lieutenant Raphael."

"Show him in at once," ordered Deadwood Dick. "We will see what he has to say for himself."

The guard bowed and took his departure, but returned ere long, accompanied by one of the rough-looking miners, who had escaped with Vernon and Garwood, from Silverton.

"Ah! Yelverton, is that you?" Raphael demanded. "What brings you here, sir?"

"I came from the captain, sir. Four of us had to take flight from Silverton, to escape Judge Lynch. We were betrayed by a fellow who is called Rosebud Rob. But, we've got him and a party of two others, hedged in down a matter o' six miles from here, and want ther gang ter come down and help finish him up. They were comin' to rescue Deadwood Dick, but we rung in a deal on em', an' got 'em cornered, where they can't fight out."

"Very well. Go tell Captain Terrible that I will fetch down a part of the gang, before long!" Raphael said. "I would come now at once, but have some other matters to look to first. Be spry, now, and convey my answer back to the captain at once."

The outlaw nodded, and took his departure from the valley.

When he had gone, Deadwood Dick turned to Raphael, inquiringly.

"Well?" he demanded, "what do you make of it?"

"Just what the fellow said; they've got Rosebud Rob and his companions cornered in some tight place, and all we've got to do is to take part of our men, and go and help them out. Do you see?"

"But, while we are absent, will not the men you bounced from the valley regain possession?"

"No. Half of our thirty men will hold the valley, and with the other half we can effect the rescue. Leave Calamity Jane in charge here, and she'll attend to it, while you accompany me."

Accordingly it was so arranged.

Calamity was left in full charge of the valley, with fifteen men under her command, and with the other fifteen, Deadwood Dick and Raphael soon rode from the secret valley, bound for the rescue.

All were well armed, and masked, and with Raphael in the lead, they dashed away down the mountain trail at breakneck speed.

We must now return to Rosebud Rob and

his party; whom we left on their way toward the stronghold of the Silent Tongues, bent on the rescue of Deadwood Dick and Calamity Jane.

Nora Van Syckel led the advance, at a rapid gallop, and the others followed but a short distance behind.

The route chosen by her was the same taken by the Silent Tongues, when they had rescued Blonde Bill, and was extremely rough and tortuous, leading through deep, dark chasms and frightful mountainous places, such as none of our three friends had ever encountered before.

About mid-afternoon, Miss Van Syckel drew rein, and waited for the others to come up.

"You had better stop here a few minutes, until I go around yonder bend and reconnoitre," she said, slipping from the saddle, and giving her bridle-rein to the Sport. "There is a place there where an enemy could lie in ambush, and once you entered the trap, they'd have you, ere you could think of it. If the route is all clear, and safe I will blow a little silver whistle, and you can come on, and fetch my horse with you. Just around the bend, the canyon forks into two. Take the left hand one and follow it, until you find me waiting for you."

Then, taking her rifle, she rode rapidly on up the gulch, until she was out of sight.

"I'll bet she discovers the outlaws, and we shall have to go back, and around the other way," Rosebud observed. "Somehow I don't trust her, just as I would an angel, for all I hired her fairly."

"Great ham-bone, no, ner I nuther," Old Avalanche declared. "These weemin ar' ther deceitfulest uv all critters on 'arth, takin' 'em as they come, on an average."

"Hark!" Rosebud Rob cried. "I thought I heard the whistle!"

They all listened, but there came no second sound of the kind.

The minutes passed by to the number of fifteen or more; then a shrill whistle from the distance was borne to their hearing.

"All's right; so come along," the Sport exclaimed; and putting the spurs to their horses, they dashed up the canyon.

Past the bend they swept, and discovered the forks in the canyon as Nora had advised.

Taking the left hand one they continued on for several minutes—then stopped abruptly.

Before them loomed up a perpendicular towering barrier of solid rock—ahead, and on either side of them.

They had entered a blind canyon, and were trapped!

Full well they realized this, when, at the sound of a low laugh, they looked back, and

saw that they were covered by a trio of rifles, which were levelled towards them by the outlaws—Vernon, Garwood, and Lester Van Syckel!

Betrayed by the latter's daughter, they were in an unenviable situation.

CHAPTER XIII

CONCLUSION

"HA! ha! you are surprised, are you not?" the Ohioan demanded, with a villainous smile. "The tables are somewhat turned, just about now!"

"In all probability," Rosebud Rob admitted, coolly. "It depends, however, upon your ability to keep us covered, whether we are long your prisoners or not."

"Oh! we'll hold the drop, don't you fear, until aid arrives," the minister announced, with a laugh, "and drop you in the most summary manner, if you attempt to budge an inch. We don't bear you any particular amount of goodwill, and should deem it a pleasure to shoot you."

"I presume so. But I am shocked to observe how very impious your reverence is growing," was the Sport's stinging retort.

At which the outlaw laughed again.

"I am sorry you have been so badly deceived in the ornament of the Silverton pulpit," he said.

"Not werry much deceived, ye consarned old polecat!" grunted Beautiful Bill. "We know'd ye were a blamed lop-sided, spindle-shanked sinner, long ago. But, we got 'most sucked in on ther female critter who led us inter ther trap. Consarn her purty mug! Beautiful Bill aire I; an' I do boldly sw'ar, declare, an' asseverate, thet if I evyer ketch my claws inter ther paraphernalyer uv thet gal, she won't never know w'ot struck her."

"Very likely, but she is safe out of your reach, long ere this," the Ohioan assured, mockingly. "A clever young lady is Miss Van Syckel, to whom we are largely indebted for your easy capture."

Then there was a pause.

Rosebud Rob, Beautiful Bill and Avalanche sat in their saddles, quietly, believing it their best course not to make any more resistance.

The three outlaws stood a few yards away, and kept their rifles levelled at their captives, steadily, evidently resolved to prevent any possible chance of escape.

"When your arms get tired, gentlemen, don't you dare to lower your weapons, for the chances stand ten to one that ere you can raise one of them, again, I can send in

a whole note!" Rosebud Rob warned. "I'm up to all such tricks, you know, and am not to be trusted!"

This elicited a scowl from the three men, for the weapons were evidently growing heavy. And the fact that the Sport's hand rested upon a pistol-butt suggested the thought that he wanted but the slightest gap left open by them to open the ceremonies.

"I guess we're good for a half-hour," the Ohioan said, "and by that time we shall have aid. The plan of your capture was prearranged, and so confident were we of its success that we sent a man to our stronghold for reinforcements, which must soon arrive."

Bravely did the three men keep their rifles up to a level with the captives' breasts, although it was evident that their arms must have ached excruciatingly.

And all the while the hawk-like eyes of the Sport were turned upon them, watching for an unguarded point.

Thus five, ten, fifteen minutes—a half an hour passed away; then there came rolling through the mountain corridors the blare of a trumpet.

A smile of triumph broke over the mock minister's countenance.

"Reinforcements," he said, with a smile, and the next minute he answered the signal with a piercing yell.

Soon, then, there came the clatter of hoofs and a party of seventeen masked outlaws dashed up, on horseback, Raphael in the lead.

"Cover yonder prisoners, lieutenant," the bogus minister cried, "and spell us, as we are near dead a-trying to keep them under the drop."

"You'll be dead in truth soon, unless Deadwood Dick chooses to spare your lives," was the reply.

"What mean you?" Vernon demanded.

"Cover them, boys!" Raphael commanded, and he was quickly obeyed. "I mean that it is you and your crowd who are

now our prisoners, instead of Rosebud Rob and his party. The tables have turned, just a little, you see. This man on my right is Deadwood Dick, and he at present, and for all time hereafter, commands the gang. You are no longer included. The Silent Tongues have been merged into the Rough and Readys, under Deadwood Dick, and all the ruffian element has been bounced out. How like you the change?"

Horrible curses came from the three baffled villains, but they were too wise to draw weapons against such odds.

"Throw down your weapons, gentlemen, and surrender," Deadwood Dick ordered, "or I shall direct my men to shoot you down on the spot."

They obeyed, and were made prisoners.

Rosebud Rob now rode forward, and was heartily received by Deadwood Dick, as were Bill and Avalanche. Then a general introduction took place, after which the whole party set out for the Golden Pocket.

The three chief members of the former band of Silent Tongues, Vernon, Van Syckel, and the deputy-sheriff, Garwood, begged so piteously for their lives and liberty, that Deadwood Dick finally concluded to let them have both, but first made them swear that, as soon as they were free, they would leave the mining country forever. They were then set at liberty, to be seen never again in the country of the *Rio de los Animas*.

Later Rosebud Rob bid a final adieu to Golden Pocket and his friends there, and journeyed to the Nor'west, with the intention of taking to himself a wife in the person of a young lady whom her friends call Cinnamon Chip.

Golden Pocket with its rich mines, is to-day a bonanza. And it has also proved to be the home-base of Richard of Deadwood, for he is still there, with his little band of friends around him, among whom are Calamity Jane, Old Avalanche, Beautiful Bill and Raphael.

THE END

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